

The Comforts of Coffee: The Role of the Coffee Ceremony in  
Ethiopians' Efforts to Cope with Social Upheaval during the Derg  
Regime (1974-1991)

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores a dark chapter in Ethiopia's recent history. In 1974, student-led demonstrations overthrew the long-reigning Emperor Haile Selassie; however, the lack of political organization allowed a small group of military men to seize power. The military regime, known as the Provisional Administrative Military Council, or Derg, completely transformed Ethiopian life. Religious, traditional, and social gatherings were fundamental to Ethiopian culture and gave Ethiopians a sense of security and identity. In addition to widespread violence, the government attacked many religious and cultural institutions by prohibiting gatherings, suppressing religious practice and by enforcing a state ban on mourning - all of which was meant to destabilize Ethiopian society. One tradition that appears to have been unaffected by the regime was the Ethiopian coffee ceremony. This thesis examines why the coffee ceremony may have evaded the government's radar as well as how it became a way for Ethiopians to cope with the social upheaval.

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A special thank you goes to my interviewees. It was their personal testimonies of growing up during Derg rule that shaped my thesis by adding depth and emotion and directing my research away from the traditional political narrative. I dedicate my thesis to them and to all Ethiopians who have suffered under the Derg regime.

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## **Introduction**

Internationally known and loved, coffee has flourished over time to become one of the most profitable commodities in the market. But in some regions of the world, it continues to be central to cultural and social ceremonies. In Ethiopia, coffee is prepared and consumed in an elaborate ritual that takes place in most households on a daily basis. Although coffee is enjoyed worldwide, the coffee ceremony is exclusively an Ethiopian tradition, and while it has long been popular throughout the country, it has received little scholarly attention. Over the years there has been a growing scholarly interest in the coffee ceremony, particularly in relation to its practice among different ethnicities and religions as well as how it is a gendered practice. But there is very little published on its history and its significance to Ethiopian culture. What is known and understood about coffee in Ethiopia has tended to focus on its economic value within the international market, while neglecting its social and cultural uses and meanings. While there is extensive literature on the social function of coffee, the discussion has centered on its social uses in the Western world in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of the coffeehouse.<sup>1</sup> Through trade, coffee spread into the Middle East and Europe, where rituals related to its use have developed in ways that reflect these respective cultures, yet the Ethiopian coffee ceremony remains misunderstood and minimally researched.

As a first-generation Canadian of Ethiopian descent I have come to learn and understand the coffee ceremony as a youth while watching my mother and other women perform it. In all my years of witnessing and partaking in it, I did not pay much attention to

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<sup>1</sup> On the history of the British coffeehouse see: Brian William Cowan, *The Social Life of Coffee: The Emergence of the British Coffeehouse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Iain Gately, *Drink: A Cultural History of Alcohol* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), 139-141.

its ritualism but I grew curious about the practice as I became older. It appeared to be such an adult affair, as children do not normally drink coffee and family friends would come over and discuss a wide range of topics. As a youth, I understood it as an attestation of my Ethiopian culture and heritage because I did not know of other cultures that performed the coffee ceremony. I was usually bored by it, particularly because I was an only child for much of my youth, and in my young mind, the coffee ceremony, which can last for hours, seemed to drag on. In Ethiopia, coffee is prepared and consumed in an elaborate and decorative ritual that takes place in many households on a daily basis, sometimes multiple times a day and solely performed by women. The coffee is roasted, ground and brewed three times and accompanied with burning incense in front of the participants. But I now understand that the preparation and consumption of coffee is deliberately never rushed, as the process is understood and valued as a time to relax, gossip, discuss politics and exchange news and ideas among family members, friends and the community.

Similar to the coffee ceremony, Ethiopia's recent history of government-led violence has not been given enough academic attention. Nor has it been given sufficient media attention, with the exception of the 1984-85 famine that provided the first major glimpse of the atrocities that occurred there at that time. In response to the famine, Irish musician Bob Geldof founded the charity group Band Aid that comprised of famous British and Irish musicians. Their 1984 song, "Do They Know it's Christmas?" raised awareness of the Ethiopian famine and its popularity prompted an American counterpart, "We Are the World" the following year. This led to a joint effort to raise funds with dual concerts called Live Aid, with many of the most famous musical acts of the 1980s projecting to the millions

watching that Ethiopia was in dire need of relief due to impoverishment.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the political situation was inaccurately presented and henceforth Ethiopia has remained a global symbol of poverty instead of an example of a tragic consequence of the Ethiopian military usurping power. This military group, called the Provisional Administrative Military Council, or colloquially known as Derg, came into power in 1974 after months of student-led mass demonstrations against the reigning Emperor Haile Selassie, whose rule lasted from 1930-1974. The Derg's usurping of power quickly altered the hopeful mood that had galvanized the anti-monarchy movement of the early 1970s into one of fear and suspicion for the next seventeen years. The sharp contrast between the peaceful revolution and the violent regime has been attributed to Mengistu Haile Mariam's obsession with attaining power and his use of ruthless measures to maintain it. It is argued that he used his position to exact revenge for injustices he experienced as a youth. Mengistu's background is not fully clear though it is believed that he experienced ethnic bigotry for not belonging to either the ruling Amhara or Tigrayan ethnic groups. His physical characteristics identified him as part of the conquered subjects of southern Ethiopia.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Marxist ideology greatly appealed to him as it justified his usage of abusive power with the encouragement of the Soviet Union. His communist proclivities were not a result of any intellectual analysis of the ideology but merely a personal choice that allowed him to do as he pleased.<sup>4</sup> He would become the leader of the Derg in 1977 only after eliminating his opposition, which included members of the

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<sup>2</sup> Bob Geldof visited Ethiopia on January 5, 1985, shortly after the success of "Do They Know it's Christmas?" and met with ex-Derg member Dawit Wolde Giorgis. In response to the song, he took Geldof to Lalibela, which is famous for its 13th century rock hewn churches, so he could see for himself a vibrant Christmas celebration. See, Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 216-217.

<sup>3</sup> David Ottaway and Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1978), 131.

<sup>4</sup> Dawit Wolde Giorgis, "Power and Famine in Ethiopia," *Wall Street Journal*, January 12, 1987.

imperial government, the student-based civilian groups, and high-ranking members within the Derg.

Growing up, I heard stories about the events that brought my parents to Canada and what they experienced living there in their teenage years through to young adulthood. I would see the scars on my father while he told me about his near-death experience. At home, I saw pictures of my young aunt who was killed in the turbulence of internal conflicts between the various revolutionary groups in the early 1980s. I also heard stories about those whom my parents loved, knew or respected, who were killed for trivial reasons, and heard about the disturbing number of dead bodies that scattered the streets and the families who could not cry for them. These and other stories, told in contrast to ones about their happy and carefree childhoods, made me wonder: how could this have happened and why is this not discussed alongside other, better-known examples of mass violence? At the same time, Ethiopia was also embroiled in two wars, the first with Eritrean secessionists which lasted from 1961-1993 and the other with Somali irredentists from 1977-78, the latter supplied and aided by the Cold War superpowers, thereby becoming one of many proxy wars that occurred in Africa during the Cold War. With the entire country in turmoil beginning in 1975, many Ethiopians risked their lives by fleeing to neighbouring countries since escaping became a less dangerous alternative to staying in Ethiopia. Although the people I interviewed for this research are not exclusively refugees, I believe it is imperative to discuss the refugee experience of Ethiopians, as it highlights the degree to which life became truly traumatizing, leading to a mass exodus that began in the late 1970s.

Before 1974, very few Ethiopians left the country and did so with the intention of returning. Since the country provided little opportunity for skilled employment, a small

number of students from elite groups studied abroad. The education received from the West would guarantee these migrants high-level, skilled jobs.<sup>5</sup> This initiative, which was largely funded by the imperial government, worked against Haile Selassie for it was these students who became exposed to socialist political ideologies and would return to Ethiopia and galvanize students to demonstrate and lead the masses against the emperor. After the revolution, when the Derg had usurped power in 1974, mounting fears of personal danger, displacement and forced conscription became factors that resulted in mass migration out of Ethiopia.

In 1991, Alex De Waal, the Associate Director of Africa Watch, a branch of Human Rights Watch, published *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* that reported the suffering underway in Ethiopia. In it, he documented the concurrent internal and external wars as well as brutal government initiatives, such as resettlement and villagization<sup>6</sup> and the famine of 1984-85, while providing figures of estimated deaths as a result of Derg rule. While many deaths cannot be accounted for, noting that “in this report are but a fraction of the total number which occurred,”<sup>7</sup> he estimated that a minimum of

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<sup>5</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 197.

<sup>6</sup> The resettlement program was a government initiative in response to the 1984-85 famine in the northern region of Ethiopia. The government declared a plan to relocate 1.5 million Ethiopians from the north to the south as a "famine relief measure". This program was extremely troublesome since it required a hasty uprooting which resulted in large numbers of people facing starvation, illness and death. An excellent read that explores the resettlement program further is Alula Pankhurst's *Resettlement and Famine in Ethiopia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Villagization was another government program that began in late 1984 that aimed to amalgamate scattered villages on the countryside "to promote social and economic development and facilitate the delivery of services such as education and water supplies". This program was extremely unpopular for it disrupted food production and controlled food supplies, which lead to resistance through violence and sabotage. See: John M. Cohen and Nils-Ivar Isaksson's "Villagization in Ethiopia's Arsi Region," *Journal of Modern African Studies* (1987), 435-64; Alex de Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Alex de Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 3.

400,000 died from the famine, 50,000 from resettlement,<sup>8</sup> 100,000 as soldiers in combat (many being victims of the government's policy on conscription),<sup>9</sup> and over 10,000 from the Red Terror, a government-led violent campaign in the late 1970s to eradicate dissident Ethiopians.<sup>10</sup> Thousands of civilian casualties were killed from the wars with Eritrea and Somalia, and thousands more in the final years of Derg rule from air raiding campaigns that the government used to target civilians in rebel-held territories.<sup>11</sup> Cumulatively, it was estimated that between one to one-and-a half million lives were lost between 1974-1991. Even providing the minimal statistics on just the fatalities, there was still a greater number of people who physically and psychologically suffered from persecution, displacement and separation.<sup>12</sup>

These circumstances, which had become part of normal life, drove many Ethiopians to flee beginning in the late 1970s. The flow of refugees grew over the years that saw movement into neighbouring Sudan, Somalia and Kenya. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that by 1984, approximately 500,000 Ethiopians had fled to Sudan, with the famine that year increasing the number of refugees by another 300,000 over the next year.<sup>13</sup> The figures of refugees fleeing to Somalia were more complicated as UNHCR numbers conflicted with those given by the Somali government; the

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<sup>8</sup>Alex de Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>11</sup> Beginning in 1988, the Ethiopian Air Force increased their bombing campaigns in response to the territorial advancements of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of rebel forces that posed a serious threat to the government. Despite difficulties in obtaining information, Africa Watch produced a report in 1990 that detailed the government's motives, targets, munitions, and casualties in "'Mengistu has Decided to Burn Us like Wood': Bombing of Civilians and Civilian Targets by the Air Force" (Africa Watch, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Alex de Waal, *Evil Days: Thirty Years of War and Famine in Ethiopia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Matt Cutts, *The State of the World's Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 111-114.

former stated that before 1981, 80,000 Ethiopians had fled to Somalia as opposed to the Somali governments' claims of 500,000. After 1981, the numbers would increase, with the UNHCR claiming over 600,000 to the Somali government's two million.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, regardless of who was correct, the figures were staggeringly catastrophic as the situation had become dire, with many making the difficult choice to leave their country. In response to the refugee crisis, Amnesty International reported in 1987 that the Ethiopian government had restricted the freedom of movement which was punishable under law, stating that “whosoever commits treason against the country and the people by illegally leaving or attempting to leave the country, is punishable with rigorous imprisonment from five to twenty-five years”.<sup>15</sup> Despite the circumstances that were forcing people to flee, leaving the country was perceived as counterrevolutionary; it was considered an act against the state. The following clause further stated that if “the offence is exceptionally grave, the punishment shall be imprisonment for life or death”; however, many people took the risk regardless of such threats and fled through various means and routes to safety, which in itself was often dangerous.

That being said, both the coffee ceremony and the Derg regime are part of my cultural and family history, as is the case for many Ethiopians. I wondered if these two extremely different facets of my heritage could be explored together; the Derg as a repressor of culture and the coffee ceremony as a means of maintaining cultural continuity. Throughout my research on these two topics, I have not yet found any literature that linked

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<sup>14</sup> Matt Cutts, *The State of the World's Refugees: Fifty Years of Humanitarian Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 107.

<sup>15</sup>The Provisional Military Administration Council, *The Revised Special Penal Code Proclamation: Ethiopian Tikdem* Proclamation No. 214 (Negarit Gazeta, 1981), 17, accessed May 23, 2016 <http://ethcriminalawnetwork.com/node/187>.

these two themes. Therefore, my thesis examines the measures the Derg took to completely reorient Ethiopian society and how the coffee ceremony was able to deflect the government's repressiveness. Unlike other social gatherings, the coffee ceremony was relatively unaffected by the changes, albeit with some exceptions which will be discussed in the third chapter.

### **Organization of Thesis**

This thesis is organized into three chapters that aim to present the situation in Ethiopia from 1974-1991, as one that was drastically and traumatically shaken up in every possible way. It first focuses on the theoretical frameworks used to substantiate my original research as well as the methodological process of recruiting respondents. It also highlights obstacles that arose from scheduling and conducting interviews, and the measures I took to adapt to these challenges.

The first chapter is a brief synopsis of the political transformation that erupted into nationwide violence in the 1970s and 80, beginning with the 1974 revolution. After months of demonstrations Emperor Haile Selassie was successfully overthrown in September 1974, but the optimism of the revolution quickly deteriorated once the military swept into government. The lack of political preparedness from the protestors allowed the Derg to usurp power immediately after the emperor was overthrown. The hopefulness of the revolution was destroyed by the military's struggle to maintain their grip on power, resulting in the Red Terror. Although the dates remain contested, many scholars have argued that it began in 1976, which is when the military regime openly and arbitrarily persecuted and

killed thousands of Ethiopians, mainly whom were students and youth.<sup>16</sup>

The remaining section of the chapter explores the cultural and religious repression of the Derg, and its effects on the day-to-day life of Ethiopians. Regardless of ethnic or religious background, many Ethiopians held religion in high esteem and social life was firmly rooted around the notion of togetherness. Regularly gathering, whether for religious celebrations, cultural commemorations, familial occasions or informal get-togethers, was key to the preservation of culture as a whole. This was what bonded Ethiopian communities together and was also what was targeted and attacked by the Derg. The concept of military rule was foreign prior to 1974, therefore to effectively rule and stay in power, the Derg needed to separate the Ethiopian people from each other in order to make them feel powerless. This was accomplished in a number of ways. One of the main methods grew out of the Derg's war with the student-led civilian revolutionary groups, which were established shortly before the revolution and grew thereafter. As the main instigators of the revolution, these student groups were seen as subversive to the government and came under attack. But this spilled over to include any groups that gathered in public. So even those who were not affiliated with the opposition or simply gathering for purposes outside of politics, were seen as threatening to the Derg and subjected to torture or death. New associations were created in place of former modes of gathering and were meant to teach the masses about Marxist-Leninist ideologies as well as to cultivate support. Therefore in order for people to gather,

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<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International published a report in 1991 addressing the issue of torture, executions and disappearances throughout the 1980s. For more information, see Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: End of an Era of Brutal Repression - A New Chance for Human Rights* (1991), accessed April 22, 2016 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/005/1991/en/>.

they needed to do so under the pretence of the Derg.<sup>17</sup>

Religion was also targeted as its practice was considered a “cancer” to the regime. Religious equality became one of the Derg's initial selling points to garner public support while they were struggling to gain power; however, its destruction was its ultimate aim.<sup>18</sup> Religion was vital to forging and maintaining social cohesion, and its suppression was meant to distance people from each other. To elaborate on the religious and cultural suppression, I provide two examples that reflected the Derg's hostility towards religion and its intention to destabilize society. The first example is the renaming of Meskel Square to Revolution Square. Prior to 1974, the square, which lay in the center of the capital Addis Ababa, held religious celebrations, public gatherings and demonstrations. It was named after the Meskel holiday, which according to Christian tradition, commemorates the finding of the cross Jesus Christ was crucified on, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. It is one of the most important holidays celebrated by Orthodox Christians with annual celebrations taking place in the square. But after the Derg took power, they renamed it to reflect Marxist-Leninist ideology. The square still served as a place for public gathering but during the regime, gatherings were meant to celebrate the Derg. Secondly, and more cruelly, was the state ban on mourning. The attempt to prohibit the natural response to human loss best reflected the Derg's devaluing of human life which ran contrary to the cultural and religious importance of

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<sup>17</sup> Numerous associations were created to group Ethiopians into a particular organization, for example, a Youth Association, a Women's Association, and an Urban Dweller's Association, with mandatory participation. See, Andargachew Tiruneh's, *The Ethiopian Revolution 1974-1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 260-261; The experience of participating in Urban Dweller's Association or Kebele was discussed in Helene Moussa's, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 133-135.

<sup>18</sup> In 1976 the Derg published the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia, a document that included a statement, declaring that all religions and ethnicities would have equal recognition. An excerpt of this is included in Galia Sabar Friedman, "Religion and the Marxist State in Ethiopia: the Case of the Ethiopian Jews," *Religion, State and Society* (1989): 247-256.

commemorating the death of loved ones. To the regime, mourning the loss of a loved one transcended the act of grieving; it was an act of dissidence which was not exempted from punishment because expressing grief demonstrated sympathy towards the ideology the Derg opponents were aligned with.<sup>19</sup> These and other cultural and religious changes were meant to destabilize society and debilitate individuals. Without the foundation of religion and traditional social practices, it became very easy for many Ethiopians to feel insecure and fearful.

The second chapter briefly examines the history and practice of the coffee ceremony. It first looks at the historical narratives surrounding coffee itself, the ceremony's origins, and its gendered nature. It examines Ethiopians' historical understanding of how coffee originated. This is followed by a summary of the history of the ceremony, which includes an examination of the trends and traditions that led to its spread throughout the country. Like coffee, the ceremony's origins have not been pinpointed by historians but it is believed it is a product of the convergence of ethnical and religious traditions.<sup>20</sup> The ceremony's ties to womanhood have been speculated to have a spiritual connection, being associated with the female deity called Atété, who is observed in the Oromo culture.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this is why the coffee ceremony has always been intertwined with femininity and learning it a rite of passage for young women. The next section looks at the ceremony itself, from the initial

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<sup>19</sup> The fear of being punished for expressing grief was a reoccurring theme in the interviews. Also, Helene Moussa provided personal stories of women who were forced to contain their grief. For further information see: Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 119-120.

<sup>20</sup> See, Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997), 523-33.

<sup>21</sup> See, Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 525-526; Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, Amal Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2004): 685.

preparations to the blessings that accompany the last brewed cup. It is a synthesis of the minor iterations of the ceremony, as there is no uniform procedure. Lastly, this chapter offers an exhaustive list exploring the many purposes of the ceremony. Reasons range from daily gatherings for women to socialize, to celebrations of all sorts, for honouring guests as well as problem solving, matchmaking and counselling, the latter used throughout the Derg regime.<sup>22</sup>

The third chapter focuses on the coffee ceremony as a social gathering that continued to be practiced despite the government's repressive measures to prohibit cultural and social gatherings. It first looks at the role of the ceremony as a gendered practice that I propose played a role in keeping it off the government's radar; that it was done at home among mothers was what may have led this gathering to be perceived as less threatening than, for example, a meeting of a group of students. It also examines the ceremony's role in providing comfort to many Ethiopians who suffered under the regime by providing a space for people to share their grievances within the confines of one's home. The state's ban on mourning prevented Ethiopians from publicly expressing their grief, which before 1974 was the cultural norm. Rather than internalize their sadness, some were able to find comfort during the coffee ceremony.

Finally, Chapter 3 examines the censorship laws in Ethiopia that made the spread of news and information extremely difficult. Throughout Derg rule, information was withheld or manipulated by the government and at the same time Ethiopians were growing suspicious

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<sup>22</sup> The following articles provide examples of celebrations and occasions that incorporate the coffee ceremony Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 525-526; Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, Amal Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2004): 681; Toru Sagawa, "Wives' Domestic and Political Activities at Home: The Space of Coffee Drinking Among the Daasanetch of Southwestern Ethiopia," *African Study Monographs* (2006):75.

of each other and losing loved ones to prison or even death, which made this period one of mass confusion. People did not know who to trust, were not informed on the whereabouts of those missing or imprisoned, and were forced to adhere to a government that had forcibly and completely transformed their way of life by prohibiting social gatherings, repressing religious practice, establishing new economic measures, and implementing Marxist-Leninist teachings into newly formed organization. The coffee ceremony, as a reminder of their former cultural traditions, became a way for people to share bits of information and regain a sense of continuity. Also, the ceremony was a form of subtle resistance to the Derg. It became a place for people to vent their frustrations, albeit with self-censorship. Conducting oneself in a manner pleasing to the government was a survival mechanism, although many actually opposed the regime. Interactions between people changed in order to ensure that one's self or others were safe from government violence. Silence, at times, was crucial to survival as it protected the lives of others despite the government's urging of the population to report subversive behaviour or action.<sup>23</sup> Minor complaints about the effects of the Derg's economic measures were also a topic that was discussed during the ceremony, due to the scarcity of coffee and its effects on the ceremony at that time. All this did not come without risk since the realignment of society had made Ethiopians fearful of each other. However, the coffee ceremony as a means of comfort and a platform for exchanging news remained a glimmer of hope for cultural stability and continuity.

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<sup>23</sup>These claims were a recurring theme in the interviews. When discussing cultural changes in Ethiopia after the revolution, many respondents stated people no longer trusted each other, that mourning was forbidden, that speaking out was forbidden. Also see: Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 68; Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 119-120.

## **Theoretical Frameworks and Methodology**

The dearth of literature on both the coffee ceremony as well as the social and cultural impact of Derg rule in Ethiopia motivated me to pursue this research. As I read the literature, I realized there was, in fact, more work on the coffee ceremony than I had previously realized, although none has linked it to life in Ethiopia during the Derg regime. The existing literature has helped to shape my understanding of the coffee ceremony as not only a social mechanism but a therapeutic one as well. Its use as a form of counseling has been borrowed by Western researchers in sociology and psychology, to help Ethiopian refugees in their new societies and give them an opportunity to share grievances and difficult experiences that accompanied resettlement in a new country as well as their previous circumstances in Ethiopia.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Dawit Wolde Giorgis's *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia*, was extremely resourceful as it provided an insider's account of the Derg's structure, its measures, and its leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam's, rise to power. Since Giorgis was an active member of the Derg before becoming disillusioned, his book provided a first-hand account of how Mengistu manipulated his way to power, removing those in his way until he attained leadership. In addition to Giorgis's work, I have included articles and books that have documented the specific events that shaped this period. Having said that, the theoretical frameworks I have used to substantiate my own research examine the themes of nationalism, cultural stories for historical construction, cultural development, the sexual

division of labour and the dynamics between oppressive and oppressed groups, as shown below.

In order to have a cohesive understanding of Ethiopian nationalism, I used Donald Levine's *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, Levine focuses on the unifying aspects of Ethiopian culture, while bringing forth the notion of Pan-Ethiopianism which he defines as a particular cultural trait such as food taboos, supernatural concepts and beliefs, ritual practices and social organizations, present in five or more ethnic group categories.<sup>24</sup> His classification consists of nine categories that include the Agew, Amhara-Tigrayan, Galla, Omotic and Sudanic, all of which comprise of related ethnical, religious and linguistic groups that developed over the last three millenniums through trade, warfare, migration, and intermarriage. His work is important because his concept of Pan-Ethiopianism examines how an established network made up of these distinct cultures laid the foundation for Ethiopian unification and nationalism over the course of 3000 years.<sup>25</sup> Pan-Ethiopianism provides clues as to how the coffee ceremony might have developed and spread, since its exact origins are still unknown. It also helps to explain how the coffee ceremony has become a cultural symbol of Ethiopia, as will be explored in more detail in chapter two.

While a great many artifacts, monuments and written accounts attest to the length and richness of Ethiopian history, part of the historical narrative has been attributed to

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<sup>24</sup>Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 60-64.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 40.

stories and myths.<sup>26</sup> Grounding this in Luise White's *Speaking with Vampires: Rumours and History in Colonial Africa*, I agree with her claim “that it is the very inaccurate jumble of events and details in these stories that makes them such accurate historical sources”.<sup>27</sup> Through the telling and retelling of stories, certain elements can become altered or distorted; however, their inaccuracies allow the historian to understand the culture from the point of view of the storyteller. The origin of coffee, though proven to have been first discovered in southern Ethiopia,<sup>28</sup> has been explained through myths, most famously with the story of a goat who, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, was noticed by his shepherd named Kaldi acting very excitedly after eating coffee beans. Trying it for himself, Kaldi too, felt the stimulating effects of the caffeine and brought it to a monastery where it was initially dismissed by the monks and thrown into fire. The aroma from the roasting beans prompted the monk to retrieve the beans to which he added hot water to make the first cup of coffee. Depending on who recounts the story, the sequence of events or the characters may vary; for example, the monk may have been described as Muslim or Christian. However, these inconsistencies matter very little because the value of the stories derives from how widespread they are. This allows the historian to grasp how a given society understands their own culture and history. The fact of

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<sup>26</sup>Examples of monuments and artifacts include minted coinage from the 4th century and constructed tall and thin stelaes which were monuments that were erected over tombs of rulers. Also, Ge'ez emerged as a written language during this period and was used in their own translation of the Bible and literature. See: Kathryn A. Bard, Rodolfo Fattovich, Andrea Manzo and Cinzia Perlingieri, “Archaeological Investigation at Bieta Giyorgis (Aksum), Ethiopia: 1993-1995 Field Study Seasons,” *Journal of Field Archaeology* (1997); Gus W. van Beek “Monuments of Axum in the Light of South Arabian Archeology,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1967); Wax and Gold: *Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972).

<sup>27</sup>Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumours and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>28</sup> See: Nicolas Petit, “Ethiopia’s Coffee Sector: A Bitter or Better Future?,” *Journal of Agrarian Change* (2007): 245; Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed our World* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 3; Rita Pankhurst, “The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia,” *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 516; Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, Amal Osman, “Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2004): 676.

the matter is that the accuracy of the stories about the discovery of coffee is marginally relevant compared to how widespread the stories are. Whether they are believed or not, stories such as the goat's discovery of coffee, provide the substance for a nationalistic construction of Ethiopia's historical narrative, allowing all to share in the pride that their nation was the first to produce and consume coffee, giving rise to the ceremony which would also become a symbol of Ethiopia.

The coffee ceremony has always been concomitant with two very fundamental points. The first is its function as a social glue and a symbol of sharing and hospitality. Secondly, it marks an important milestone for young women as its performance is a symbol of Ethiopian womanhood. These two important factors, which are unique to Ethiopian culture, contribute both to the development of culture and its continuation. According to Barbara Rogoff, the way in which an individual develops is through active participation in their given societies. Her book, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*, tackles the notion of human development by examining the cultural patterns that are produced and reproduced by people's participation. She argues that individuals “develop as participants in cultural communities” and that “their development can be understood only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their given communities”.<sup>29</sup> What keeps the coffee ceremony in particular alive are societal expectations for young girls to gradually learn how to perform it as well as the expectation of society members to regularly partake of it. The knowledge is transferred to the following generation in early adolescence as it has been culturally accepted that that is the appropriate time to learn it. And this production and

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<sup>29</sup> Barbara Rogoff, *The Cultural Nature of Human Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-4.

reproduction sustains the culture as it incorporates all members, each with their respective roles in the ceremony.

While Rogoff's work is used to explain the importance of individual participation in traditional practices to understand cultural development, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the sexual division of labour, helps us to understand the gendered division that exists in the performance of the coffee ceremony, though not necessarily the participation. (Although the coffee ceremony has primarily been within a woman's domain, men too have often taken part in the ceremony, which was evident with the men that I interviewed). Bourdieu's theory has been applied to the ceremony since the tradition has remained one that is emblematic of a gendered divide in modern Ethiopia, despite women's involvement in the workforce and active participation in warfare.<sup>30</sup> Ethiopian culture has been inextricably linked with patriarchy that which has been classified as part of a woman's domain reflects this. Alternatively put, a man's gender can be called into question if he crosses that gendered line, for example if he performs the ceremony.<sup>31</sup> Scholars like Rita Pankhurst, Janet Yedes, Amal Osman, and Robbin Clamons (the latter three working collectively) and a few of the men I interviewed<sup>32</sup> have mentioned that there is a link between the ceremony and womanhood

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Tigrayan women comprised of about 30% of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front, a rebel group that fought against the Derg. In John Young's, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front 1975-1991* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). On page 210 he stated that many women participated in combat to escape the rigid gender roles. In Thera Mjaaland's article "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony: Woman's Agency in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia," *Årboksredakjonen in Betwixt and Between Sosialantropologistudentenesårbok*. (University of Oslo, 2004) Mjaaland examines the gender ambiguity found in combat, that while equality existed within the rebel group, women were expected to resume their traditional roles upon returning to civilian life.

<sup>31</sup> Thera Mjaaland, "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony: Woman's Agency in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia," *Årboksredakjonen in Betwixt and Between Sosialantropologistudentenesårbok*. (University of Oslo, 2004), 71.

<sup>32</sup> See: Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997); Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, Amal Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2004).

through a female deity called Atété, the goddess of fertility in the Oromo culture. These scholars discuss that women hold ceremonies used to celebrate birth or promote reconciliation that feature the deity and comprise almost exclusively of women. Coffee is often incorporated into these ceremonies, thus this perhaps provides clues as to why the coffee ceremony is strictly performed by women. The performance of the coffee ceremony has been held in high esteem as a marker of Ethiopian womanhood along with marriage and motherhood. Being kept within a woman's domain has perhaps saved the ceremony from the Derg's reorienting of society and culture, which will be discussed further in chapter three. While the cultural practices that prescribed the coffee ceremony to womanhood may have salvaged it, it has been simultaneously used as a platform for subtle resistance. This was because the ceremony presented a window of opportunity for people to share information despite the government's stern laws on censorship. Individual and group interactions were heavily monitored, not only by the Derg, but by virtually everyone. Derg rule, in addition to its violence, was an era of paranoia and fear that even being suspected of saying anything subversive was enough to be persecuted or killed.<sup>33</sup> Using James C. Scott's notion of public transcripts vs. hidden transcripts, interactions needed to be modified to ensure survival. Scott's analysis of the relationship between dominant and oppressed groups on the basis of their 'transcript' speaks to the dynamic between the Derg and those they oppressed. In his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Scott uses the terms public transcript and hidden transcript, with the former as a “shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate.”<sup>34</sup> The hidden transcript describes a

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<sup>33</sup>Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 63.

<sup>34</sup> James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2.

“discourse that takes place ‘offstage,’ beyond direct observation by powerholders” and is “derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript” which is meant for “a different audience and under different circumstances.”<sup>35</sup> When the Derg passed a law that banned mourning<sup>36</sup>, silence regarding grief became part of the public transcript while at the same time people had to profess their allegiance to the Derg. Conforming to the regime by adopting a new public transcript became a way to survive. Alternatively, complaining in private was a form of resistance, but kept within the confines of a trusted group. Not knowing who was aligned with who made this risky; however, truthful conversations that posed subtle opposition became a way of dealing with and resisting Derg rule in the coffee ceremony.

## **Methodology**

This thesis is primarily grounded in oral history methodology, with each of my respondents adding to the larger story of cultural repression under the Derg and how the coffee ceremony provided some semblance of cultural stability and continuity. For this research, I interviewed twelve Ethiopians, eleven of whom grew up in Ethiopia during the regime; the twelfth was a newly immigrated 27-year-old Ethiopian woman who could only speak about the coffee ceremony, since she was born in the late 1980s. Though not able to connect her experiences to the broader topic of this research, her interview was

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<sup>35</sup>James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> Reports, literature and information from interviews have not specified an exact date as to when the government passed a law that banned mourning but all have stated that it took place during the Red Terror. For more information on the state ban see: Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Ethiopia: Reckoning under the Law* (1994), 7; Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 64.

very helpful in understanding the practice of the ceremony and its importance to womanhood. In the search for participants, those Ethiopian-Canadians who agreed to be interviewed happened to be male, and to complement the lack of female voices, I consulted Helen Moussa's *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees*, a study based on interviews Moussa conducted with sixteen women who settled in Canada in the early 1990s. Her book contains a vivid account of each woman's experience through their own stories. Moussa constructs this narrative by weaving their stories of how they remembered their lives before the 1974 revolution, the regime's socio-political changes, the violence they or their loved ones endured in Ethiopia throughout the 1970s and 80s, the difficult decision to leave the country, and their resettlement in Canada. The interviews I conducted, in tandem with Moussa's work, gave a fuller representation of how both men and women of all religious and ethnic backgrounds suffered under the Derg.

As a methodological approach that has accompanied many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, oral history has gained recognition in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a respected research method. With the technological innovations of audio recording, researchers have been able to document oral narratives as historical artifacts.<sup>37</sup> Defined as "the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form," oral research or in-depth interviews, requires the researcher to have a sense of openness because of the unexpected nature of interviews.<sup>38</sup> This openness and flexibility has helped me to understand how my finished thesis has evolved from what I had originally proposed, as a

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<sup>37</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

result of the information gleaned from the researching process. One of many types of primary research, oral research provides an alternative means to answering questions unlike any other methodological approach.<sup>39</sup> For example, autobiographies tend to be written by people of political, social or intellectual influence, meaning that these narratives may not be representative of a larger population. This small group of people that occupy positions of leadership and power do not have a shared experience with the vast majority. But with in-depth interviews, the oral historian has control over who is interviewed and what sorts of questions are asked, thereby adding different dimensions to a historical narrative.<sup>40</sup>

Although I had a preconceived research question in mind, it was the information that I gathered through interviews that determined the research question I set out to answer. The conversations that I had opened my eyes to different ways of approaching my thesis, which made me realize that the topic was limitless. Many of the themes discussed in the following chapters such as public gatherings, censorship, and mourning, had stemmed from the interviews, which I had noticed were reoccurring throughout the oral research. This thesis, which has largely been shaped by oral research, examines the Derg period outside of the traditional narrative. Much of what has been documented about Derg rule has focused on political history - the transition of government, the internal conflict between revolutionary groups and the arbitrary political violence on innocent civilians. This construction of history tends to exclude the day-to-day experiences of ordinary people. Through personal testimonies, historians have a better

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<sup>39</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1994), 9.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 24.

understanding of what daily life was like and how it drastically changed after 1974. By limiting the narrative to one that is framed around a political lens, it is difficult to understand how people coped with not only the violence, but the social and cultural changes that accompanied the governmental transition. Through oral history I was able to add a dimension as to how Ethiopians may have dealt with trauma through the coffee ceremony.

It was through the researching process that I truly saw the benefits of oral research. As mentioned in the introduction, the situation in Ethiopia in this period is grossly understated in the academic discussion of global political violence. However, it appears that there is a cultural silence as well. This was brought to my attention by a statement made by one of my interviewees, who I had just met at a conference. He said that many Ethiopians do not talk about this period due to shame and guilt, also adding that in the time that he has lived in Canada, he had not once discussed his experiences with anyone, including his family. After hearing that, I wanted to interview him, hoping that he would share some of his experiences with me, to which he agreed. Likewise, another one of my respondents also said that the regime is not a topic of discussion among Ethiopians. The feelings of shame, guilt and sadness have left many not wanting to talk about their experiences, repressing them so as to not have to relive it in their memories.

Another reason for this cultural silence is that voices were repressed under Derg rule. The majority of Ethiopians were subjected to the governments' repressive censorship laws, which will be discussed in detail in the final chapter. Information was

withheld or manipulated by the regime and speaking out against the government resulted in imprisonment, torture or death. By preventing the dissemination of information, people were unable to fully know or understand what was happening around them. By conducting in-depth interviews, the oral historian gives the respondent the opportunity to provide their own understanding or interpretation of Derg rule as they remember it. The interview becomes a voice to the voiceless; that through eye-witness accounts, testimonies are coalesced "within the historical record" to include "the experiences and perspectives of groups of people who might otherwise have been 'hidden from history'".<sup>41</sup>

An oral historian is reliant on the memories of their respondents because it is through the interviews that the narrator is given the opportunity "to remember, to convey details, to provide explanations and to reflect."<sup>42</sup> Oral historian Valerie Raleigh Yow argues that the human memory is both fallible and trustworthy<sup>43</sup> maintaining that "overall a narrator's account is accurate but some details may be missing or erroneous" and that "some inaccuracies do not negate the value of the entire testimony."<sup>44</sup> Most of the men I interviewed were old enough to remember the revolution and the subsequent events that occurred. What I noticed when examining the transcribed interviews were the lack of dates. When recounting personal experiences, phrases such as, "I remember," "I saw" or "when I was young" were often used instead of pinpointing a date. Those phrases also provide an assertion that they were present; that they were witnesses to or survivors of

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), ix.

<sup>42</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1994), 35.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

violent acts. The audience, whether it be the interviewer or the reader, are able to have access to the personal experiences that took place.<sup>45</sup> This was particularly telling throughout the interviews when the men brought up accounts of seeing dead bodies on the streets, witnessing people killed in front of them, or being tortured themselves. Soon after the military assumed power, violence and executions became the norm in Ethiopia. Despite the fact that it was commonplace, it was easier to remember tragic events because the environment was so drastically different from anything the interviewees had known.<sup>46</sup>

What was also reoccurring in the interviews was the prohibition of gatherings. There was a consensus throughout the respondents that the Derg went after people who gathered, especially youth, but the numbers that constituted a 'threatening group' varied from four, to five or even ten. Some did not even mention a number, simply stating that gathering in public was dangerous. Rather than this being viewed as inconsistent or inaccurate, it appears to reflect how each person remembered this major social shift. Looked at it collectively, the information is consistent.<sup>47</sup>

One of the drawbacks of oral history is its time restriction. A period or event is given a limited amount of time before it can no longer be researched orally. The Derg regime, having ended over two decades ago is still very recent, with survivors and

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<sup>45</sup> Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 35.

<sup>46</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1994), 42. Yow mentions that psychologists studying memory believe that "repeated everyday events" are not as vivid as a single dramatic event. She juxtaposes this claim by incorporating discussing a study on concentration camp life stating that dramatic events occurred throughout daily life were remembered well. I use the latter claim to explain how some of my interviewees were able to recall events with relative ease and detailed descriptions.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

witnesses now in their forties and older. In order to construct a fuller historical narrative of what occurred in those seventeen years, more personal testimonies are needed. Given the time since the overthrow of the Derg, there has been a considerable amount of time to make sense of the events in the past. This is especially important now because the witnesses and survivors have reached middle age and it is argued that that is when people have more memories of their childhood, adolescence and young adult life.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the potential to have a narrative that is representative of all the experiences during the Derg era is only possible if more oral research is conducted in the next few years.

Particularly with this subject matter, another drawback is trying to reconcile the inquisitive and investigative nature of the researcher but also being sensitive to the fact that questions may arouse feelings of sadness, anger or shame. One of the ways I prepared myself in the event of an uncomfortable situation was sharing my own personal stories with the respondents. As a Canadian of Ethiopian heritage, the Derg regime and the coffee ceremony are two areas of my heritage that I have acquired personal knowledge of. I have participated and witnessed the coffee ceremony as long as I can remember and I have heard how the Red Terror traumatically affected my family since my youth. I consulted Steven High's *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement*, a book that highlights the Rwandan Genocide, the Khmer Rouge and other traumatic events through oral histories. High states that the importance of oral histories is to have a better understanding on how large-scale violence is experienced and remembered. Part of this understanding is established through a rapport

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<sup>48</sup> Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1994), 35.

between the interviewer and the interviewee and therefore I sought to create this trust between myself and the interviewee by being open about my familial experiences.<sup>49</sup>

The approach of oral history is to provide an alternative narrative to the traditional construction of historical writing. This means that a narrative is not dominated by a single voice but rather, through oral history, it is the everyday people that write their own history which better reflects their own lived experiences.<sup>50</sup> It is through oral history that I came to learn of many potential areas of study that have not been given particular attention. Some of which are included in the following chapters and others I discuss in the conclusion as potential research topics. With the collaboration of the interviewees, our aim is to add another dimension to understanding Derg rule.

### The Respondents

In February 2016, I was granted ethics clearance from Carleton University's Research Ethics Board (REB) to conduct oral research. The interviewees were eleven men representing different ethnicities and religions practiced in Ethiopia, as well as one young Ethiopian woman, all of whom agreed to have their names included in my thesis. The interviews consisted of one-on-one interactions as well as focus groups that were audio recorded with their consent. Beginning each session by gathering background information, I learned that the discussion of ethnicity was complex because it has been a sensitive and

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<sup>49</sup> Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 27.

provocative issue in Ethiopia due to the divisiveness that has existed in the country.<sup>51</sup> In the interviewing process, all the men, with the exception of one, answered the question “what ethnicity do you identify with”; however, there were some that stated that they do not believe in the question although they would answer it for sake of the research. Those that did not believe in the concept of ethnicity explained that they identified themselves as Ethiopians over their ethnic classification. The one respondent who did not answer the question stated that he did not know which ethnicity he belonged to; that he originated from Dire Dawa, which is a city that is predominately Oromo but also has Amhara, Somali, Gurage and others. Due to the diversity within the city, he could presumably belong to any of these ethnic groups. From the remaining ten, four of them identified as Amhara, two identified as Tigrayan, one identified as Oromo, two grew up in Ethiopia but had parents who were Eritrean, and one classified himself as both Oromo and Amhara. The men also represented different areas of Ethiopia: two were from the capital, Addis Ababa, one was from Adigrat and another was from Axum, two cities in Tigray. Three were from Harar and one from Dire Dawa, both cities in eastern Ethiopia. Two were from Gondar in north-western Ethiopia, with one of them growing up in Addis Ababa. Interestingly, one of them stated that he was from Gojjam, which since 1995 has been divided and absorbed into neighbouring new provinces following the drafting of a new constitution that year. Gojjam still exists as a region in north-western Ethiopia; however, it is no longer recognized as a

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<sup>51</sup> Between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, Zagwe and Solomonic dynasties, emerged in succession, to revive the old Christian Axumite kingdom. Beginning in 1527, a series of conflicts with the neighbouring Islamic kingdom of Adal to the east, the Galla ethnic group from the south and the Ottoman Turks left the Ethiopian kingdom in disarray. Donald Levine argues that the Solomonic period (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century) was the "matrix of Ethiopian political unity" which became "splintered in several directions" as a consequence of these conflicts. This political division, he states, "was accompanied by a peculiar cultural bifurcation" which helps to explain ethnic divisions in the modern era. For more information, read Donald Levine's, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 18-21.

province. Perhaps he is from that specific region or maybe he identifies with the former province of Gojjam. Though this was not brought up in the questions, it became apparent that the eleven men came from different religious backgrounds, representing Orthodox Christianity, Pentecostalism and Islam. The degree to which they practiced their religion was not thoroughly discussed though, in addition to ethnic background, the religious diversity from my respondents speaks to the religious mosaic that exists in Ethiopia and abroad.

All eleven men that were interviewed for this research were either witnesses to or were directly affected by the Derg regime and by “directly affected,” I mean that either they themselves or those they intimately knew were persecuted, imprisoned or killed as a result of Derg leadership. The men that were interviewed, despite their differences in ethnicity and religion, had experienced the Derg similarly: as a regime that dramatically altered their way of life and threatened their survival in Ethiopia, ultimately resulting in the difficult decision for some to flee. Of the eleven men interviewed, two of them arrived in Canada in the 1980s, six of them arrived in the 1990s, and three of them arrived in the early 2000s. From the eleven men, five of them were refugees with two of these men imprisoned before fleeing. A third man stated that he feared imprisonment and therefore escaped. Two other men were also imprisoned although they did not experience refugee life. Of the five refugees, four of them described their journey to Canada and where they lived in Ethiopia would determine the route they took to escape. The first man came from Harar, a city in north-eastern Ethiopia, so his escape route began in Djibouti before going to Somalia, Italy and finally Canada. Residing in another city in north-eastern Ethiopia, Dire Dawa, and a second man also escaped to Djibouti before going Egypt and settling in Canada. The third

man to speak of his escape was from Adigrat, a town in northern Ethiopia who fled to Sudan before going to Egypt and Canada. Lastly, the fourth man, who lived in Addis Ababa, fled to Sudan where he spent ten years before moving to Egypt and finally arriving in Canada eleven years after initially leaving Ethiopia. Because these men were young at that time, it was a particularly frightening time to live there. The diversity of their backgrounds and their journeys to Canada provided tremendous insight into understanding how quickly and traumatically life changed and revealed how similar the experience was for all Ethiopians. It is also important to note that while the men interviewed are part of the Ethiopian Diaspora, this research is not about the experience in Diaspora but rather how their lives were affected by Derg rule.

#### Method of Recruitment: Interviews

Initially, my aim was to interview both men and women who lived in Ottawa and Toronto, due to the latter's proximity to Ottawa and its higher population of Ethiopians; however, the process deviated from my intended vision. As I consulted Moussa's work, I came to realize that a male Canadian voice was needed to add to the existing literature while at the same time remaining true to the idea of having respondents that represented Ethiopians in terms of ethnic and religious backgrounds. My method of recruitment involved various means to find potential candidates for this research including family connections, acquaintances, word of mouth, the Ethiopian embassy, and social media. The help provided by family was twofold. First, my father had told me stories about his experiences growing up during the Derg era as well as fleeing for safety. These stories ignited my passion to want to closely examine such a tragic period, one that is both recent

yet given too little attention by scholars. Because of my prior knowledge of my father's life as a boy and young man, he was an ideal candidate to further explore the Derg's changing policies and their effects on Ethiopian society and culture. Second, I have a cousin who lives in Kitchener, Ontario, who referred me to an older Ethiopian gentleman who gladly set up a group interview for me with four other men, all over the age of 40. I traveled to Kitchener to interview the five men, all of whom provided testimonies of their youth and adolescence from the hopeful time of the revolution in 1974 to the drastic shift of nearly two decades of constant fear and persecution. I also knew of two other Ethiopian men, whom I met at Carleton University. The first man works at the university library and is acquainted with my father. I asked if he was interested in being interviewed as well as if he knew other Ethiopians who would be too. He expressed his interest and got back to me, informing me of two other men who were also interested. As a group, they too shared their experiences growing up in their respective cities and witnessing first-hand the ongoing tragedies around them. I had met the second man from Carleton University after speaking at a conference for the Institute of African Studies on the Red Terror in 2015. In the question and answer portion, he voiced his opposition to my characterization of the Derg leader, Mengistu, stating that he was a fascist (when he has often been portrayed as a communist) and briefly spoke about his personal experiences fighting in one of the rebel groups. After the conference, I spoke to him and once I retrieved his contact information, I asked if he would be interested in providing further detail in an interview, to which he replied yes. Through an acquaintance of my own, I recruited another respondent, who was her father. This acquaintance also attempted to help me recruit Ethiopians within her own circle through social media but was unsuccessful; however, her father's willingness to share his own

account gave great insight into the day-to-day life of Ethiopians, as well as shed light on issues that I had not thought of, greatly benefiting my research; since he lived in Windsor, Ontario, I conducted the interview over Skype. Ultimately, word-of-mouth through family and acquaintances was the most successful method of recruitment.

As this was my first time conducting interviews for research, the experience of these discussions was eye-opening. As a topic that I feel both close to and detached from, I became more and more passionate about my project the more I spoke to the respondents. What is extraordinary about these men and their unwritten stories (that are not written about previously in the literature) is the emotion that comes with the recounting and sharing of memories. Bit by bit, their stories contributed to a more complete picture of what occurred during the Derg regime.

### Recruitment Obstacles

While the interviewing process gave me great insight into the difficult lives these men lived under Derg rule, recruitment was challenging. The three main obstacles I faced were finding Ethiopians, gender disparity, and language barriers, which I will discuss sequentially, including what I did to adapt to each challenge. In an effort to find other Ethiopians, I went to the Ethiopian embassy, located in downtown Ottawa, and although they were supportive of the research, it was a particularly busy time for the employees there. By the time potential respondents were suggested to me, I had already concluded the interviewing process. Fearing that this would limit the time needed to complete the research, I decided to forego the additional interviews. I also visited a couple of Ethiopian restaurants in Ottawa where one owner had informed me that her sister would be interested, and it was

not until I met her that I discovered that she was the same age as myself, thus only being an infant by the time the Derg was overthrown. However, I went ahead with the interview and through our discussion, it became clear that the coffee ceremony was still alive in Ethiopia as she is part of the next generation of women who continued with the practice. Additionally, she plays a significant role in performing the coffee ceremony to a western audience, as has been a growing trend in Ethiopian restaurants. Finally, through my own search on social media, I located Ethiopian communities in Ottawa on Facebook. I posted on their pages, explaining my research and asking if there would be people interested in being interviewed. Similar to my experience with the embassy, by the time I was contacted, I was too far along in the writing process to take advantage of these opportunities.

My principle research aim was to have a diversity of gender, ethnic and religious representation. While I succeeded in the latter two, all those who agreed to participate were men. Despite my efforts to locate women, I found myself facing interesting scenarios. For example, when I located a potential respondent, through my cousin in Kitchener, he was keen on doing the interviews and said he would find other Ethiopians as well. Explaining that I was looking for diversity among the interviewees, he informed me that he had people in mind. When I arrived in Kitchener, he introduced me to four other men of the appropriate age group and representing different ethnicities; however, there were no women. I am not sure if they were asked or if asked, if they declined. An Ethiopian woman I acquainted myself with told me that she was not interested but that she knew other women who would be. After informing me that she gave them the letter of information required by the REB, she said that they would contact me on their own. On a week-by-week basis I checked with her but still she had not heard from them. I asked, since they were interested, if I could have

their contact information, which she said she did not have but would obtain for me. This went on for some time but unfortunately I did not get the relevant contact details. There were other women whom I spoke to but seemed hesitant, and I told the men that I interviewed that I was interested in speaking with their wives, but in the end I did not hear back from them.

While I wanted to hear from women, I did not want to lose the opportunity of speaking with the men who chose to participate. It was interesting to hear from men about their views of a practice that has always been culturally prescribed to women. These men have witnessed their mothers, wives and other female family members perform the coffee ceremony, therefore they are not at all oblivious to how it is performed. When asking the respondents what the procedure and purpose of the coffee ceremony was, their answers were very similar, not just to each other, but also to my own. In their description of the ceremony's steps, it was remarkable how many of them even incorporated the motion of roasting the coffee beans over a stove as well as using their hands to simulate the grinding of coffee. Their discussion never minimized the role or function of the coffee ceremony as either a communal practice or as a gathering for women to socialize alone. When I was not able to find women, I realized that perhaps men too had something valuable to contribute to the coffee ceremony, and they did.

A possible hindrance to the research process was language. One incident involved meeting a middle-aged couple in Ottawa, who incidentally knew my parents. After acquainting ourselves, I discussed my research with them and noticing their excitement in my work, I took that as a cue to ask if they would be interested, to which they replied yes and that they would like for it to take place the following weekend. When that fell through, I

called the wife asking if she would like to do the interview on another day. She said that she wanted to speak with her husband first and then would call back. After another week passed by and still no contact, I made another attempt, but again I received the same response. I spoke to my father about this and he said that perhaps this was not a matter of being uninterested but may be due to a language barrier, which is very much a possibility. I had a couple of instances where the respondents stated they were not comfortable speaking in English, to which I replied that it would be a collaborative effort to work through any misunderstandings or miscommunication. I was not comfortable conducting interviews in any of the Ethiopian languages. My knowledge of Tigrinya (a language spoken in the northern Ethiopia) is only conversational and all of my respondents could speak Amharic, Ethiopia's official language, which I do not know how to speak therefore the interviews had to be in English. The other point I made was that I was there to learn from them and that their stories were valuable. But regarding the couple, I never heard back from them.

### **Other Primary Sources**

To supplement the interviews, other primary sources I utilized for this research include newspaper articles from the *London Times* and the *New York Times*, with the former covering what was happening in Ethiopia far more than the latter. I also obtained copies of the Ethiopian constitutions of 1931 and 1987, which refer to the periods ruled by Emperor Haile Selassie and the Derg respectively, and I have also consulted the Revised Special Penal Code, which was drafted along with the 1987 Ethiopian constitution. It details what was considered a crime and how crime was to be punished. Africa Watch and Amnesty International have monitored the human rights abuses and have publicized the atrocities

committed by Derg against the Ethiopian people despite the difficulty of obtaining substantial information. Amnesty International stated in a 1991 report that “the Mengistu government hardly ever disclosed publicly any information about political prisoners, although official records and prisoner statistics were kept”. Additionally, “former political prisoners were coerced into silence...even in exile in a country where their safety was assured, some were still afraid of reprisals against their families in Ethiopia if the authorities were to learn that they had talked about their imprisonment”.<sup>52</sup> Though knowing that students had led the demonstrations that resulted in the overthrow of the emperor, I knew little of what ultimately pushed the students to the point of orchestrating a revolution. During an interview, one of the respondents brought up the Sector Review, officially known as the Report on the Organization of Education in Ethiopia, which added substance to the discussion on the student protests. Published in 1973, it was meant to be implemented in the 1973-1974 school year and outlined the new educational guidelines limiting the academic and professional opportunities of Ethiopian students, infuriating both them and their teachers and motivating to revolt against the monarchy.<sup>53</sup> This would become the catalyst for the 1974 revolution.

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<sup>52</sup>Amnesty International, *Ethiopia: End of an Era of Brutal Repression - A New Chance for Human Rights* (1991), 2, accessed April 22, 2016 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr25/005/1991/en/>.

<sup>53</sup> See: Report on the Organization of Education in Ethiopia 1971-1972 & 1972-1973, "Imperial Ethiopian Government Ministry of Education & Fine Arts," (Addis Ababa, 1973), accessed April 25, 2016 [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National\\_Reports/Ethiopia/nr\\_mf\\_et\\_1973\\_e.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/Ethiopia/nr_mf_et_1973_e.pdf).

## **Chapter One: A Desire for Change and the Realignment of Ethiopian Society**

The 1974 Ethiopian revolution quickly and dramatically altered the country's political, economic and cultural structure. Following the governmental model of the Soviet Union, the first priority of the new “communist” regime—the Provisional Military Administrative Council or Derg—was to stamp out elements of the Ethiopian imperial family, as well as religious, cultural and traditional practices. Ethiopia’s history of feudalistic and monarchical rule goes back to the fourth century, when Christianity was also adopted, thus becoming the second country to declare it as its official religion. The suppression of these traditional values began as soon the regime declared Ethiopia as both *communist* and secular.

This chapter will first look at the events that spurred the revolution in the months preceding Haile Selassie's dethronement. While examining the events of 1974, a hopeful mood resonated among the Ethiopian masses as change appeared imminent; this was quickly shattered when the revolution took an unexpected turn following the Derg's ascension to power. The aftermath of the revolution marks a major turning point in Ethiopia when drastic yet positive change suddenly became drastic and violent resulting in the Red Terror. In addition to the widespread violence this chapter also examines the Derg's efforts to repress cultural and religious practices; however, it will first discuss the formation of modern Ethiopian culture and its significance to the livelihood of the Ethiopian people, before and during Derg rule. This chapter will explore the Derg's attempt to restructure society by prohibiting social gatherings and show how its policies that had detrimental effects on communities. Displacing many types of cultural and traditional gatherings, political and ideological associations were created requiring mandatory social participation. Next, this

chapter will discuss the Derg's efforts to completely remove religion from Ethiopia. Religion, regardless of which systematic system of faith, acted as a social bond and therefore, to govern effectively, the Derg sought to stamp it out. The third part of this chapter is an extension of the previous section by highlighting an example of how the Derg aimed to suppress religion. Changing the name Meskel Square to Revolution Square was an effort to disassociate religion from a place where religious celebrations had taken place. While the Derg remained in power, the square was exclusively used for “revolutionary” gatherings, in keeping with the regime's ideology. The last section is an example of the government's measures to fully weaken the Ethiopian population. In the heightened period of violence and executions during the Red Terror, there was a state ban on mourning those who were killed by the Derg. Mourners were considered opponents to the government and could face punishment up to and including death, for their grieving was deemed an expression of allegiance with the enemy or “the counterrevolutionaries.” Hence mourning was denied its legitimacy as a natural response to losing loved ones. Traditionally, the process of mourning was always public and involved certain rituals. But those who experienced loss in the Derg era needed to contain their grief in order to survive.

### **The Ethiopian Revolution**

By 1974, protests against Emperor Haile Selassie had grown exponentially with people of all classes publically demonstrating their discontent with the government.<sup>54</sup> In the

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<sup>54</sup> See, Aregawi Berhe, "The Origins of the Tigray People's Liberation Front," *African Affairs* (2004): 571-572. In 1943, two years after the return of the exiled Haile Selassie, a peasant uprising erupted in Tigray, the country's northernmost province. The constant struggle to fend off invaders in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries caused considerable damage and widespread poverty while the rest of the nation enjoyed relative stability. In order to quell the revolt, he collaborated with the British Royal Air Force who heavily

months preceding Haile Selassie's dethroning, state-run newspapers, radio stations and television had unleashed attacks on the monarchy, thereby expanding the demonstrations throughout the country and galvanizing the people into action. The 1970s saw major global and domestic changes that propelled Ethiopians into mass demonstrations. In 1973, the oil embargo had massive global repercussions as a result of escalating world oil prices. This affected Ethiopian taxi drivers as the petrol prices skyrocketed. As a result, taxi drivers, who were the primary source of transport for workers and unions, went on strike in February 1974.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, under the imperial government, the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts implemented a new educational system for the 1973-1974 school year, which was laid out in the Report on the Organization of Education in Ethiopia, also known as the Sector Review. The ministry concluded that the present educational system was “too rigid and formal and caters only to a small minority” and that the “curriculum which is still largely restricted to the study of academic subjects...does not allow sufficiently for the practical application of this knowledge or for the development of practical skills which are needed for the general development of the country”.<sup>56</sup> This outraged students and teachers as this provided limited opportunities within academia and future professional endeavours. In response to the Sector Review, over 17,000 teachers within the Teacher's Union took to the

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bombarded cities and villages, killing thousands of civilians. And to deter any future revolts, Haile Selassie had increased taxation fivefold, had ordered the people to pay a fine and confiscated land that was later rewarded to those among the upper class who were loyal to him. Also see, Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2001). On page 209 he stated that in the 1960's there was a failed coup d'etat to overthrow Haile Selassie. This was one of the most important events that marked a forerunner to the 1974 revolution. Although unsuccessful, it planted the seeds of revolution and ideas of change took root.

<sup>55</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 54.

<sup>56</sup>Report on the Organization of Education in Ethiopia 1971-1972 & 1972-1973, "Imperial Ethiopian Government Ministry of Education & Fine Arts," (Addis Ababa, 1973):11, accessed April 25, 2016 [http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National\\_Reports/Ethiopia/nr\\_mf\\_et\\_1973\\_e.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/Ethiopia/nr_mf_et_1973_e.pdf)

streets in a nation-wide strike, protesting and demonstrating against the changes. Students in Addis Ababa joined in as well, and those exposed to leftist views provided a “Marxist class interpretation of the unrest”.<sup>57</sup> The University Teachers Association as well as parents of students and unemployed youth also took part in the massive demonstrations as the ministry stressed that “education will become work oriented...to provide skill training relevant to its pupils” including education related to “farming, to cottage industries, to crafts and to trades” emphasizing that “education will become practical not academic and abstract [to] provide basic living skills relevant to rural inhabitants”.<sup>58</sup> Solomon Aklilu, an Ethiopian youth at the time of the revolution, mentioned that the Sector Review was a major push to the already simmering discontent with the monarchy. He remembered the government introducing it and explained that the Sector Review meant that:

If you are police daughter, you would be police if... your father is a farmer, you have to be a farmer. He brought that kind of rule which is absolutely rubbish, you know. It's not necessary to bring that, then students said 'no' and started throwing stones and everywhere it was, it was chaos.<sup>59</sup>

Other sectors also participated in the demonstrations, thereby engulfing various ethnic, class and ethnic groups into a wider outcry for change. These groups included civil servants, hospital workers, army veterans, prostitutes, journalists etc., protesting against the increasing consumer goods prices as well as demand for their rights. Priests also demanded that their living and working conditions improve as many of them were poverty stricken and

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<sup>57</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 54.

<sup>58</sup> Report on the Organization of Education in Ethiopia 1971-1972 & 1972-1973, "Imperial Ethiopian Government Ministry of Education & Fine Arts," (Addis Ababa, 1973): 12.  
[http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National\\_Reports/Ethiopia/nr\\_mf\\_et\\_1973\\_e.pdf](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/National_Reports/Ethiopia/nr_mf_et_1973_e.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> Solomon Aklilu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Carleton University, April 11, 2016.

over 150,000 Muslims also demanded state recognition of Islam as they represented a large minority in a Christian nation. Other ethnic groups were fighting for self-determination and official recognition as they felt alienated by the government.<sup>60</sup> With the exception of an aristocratic minority, there was not a single group of Ethiopians that were untouched or unaffected. In fact, Daniel Belay, a young adolescent, remembers the revolution with a particular fondness, stating that “it was tumultuous but at the same time... when you look at it, it's very nostalgic”.<sup>61</sup> He elaborated on this notion of nostalgia simply on the idea of change:

It was change, it was a time of change... it's a mass movement. When there is a mass movement...people are less afraid. People are more encouraged...when people do things together, collectively, it becomes...something romanticized in a way... it was not a bloody revolution...If that was the case, you know, it would become less nostalgic...everywhere, you hear those new ... words, 'power to the people' you know, 'the land to the tiller' so many things, hopeful things, 'Ethiopia forward' and everybody shouting the same [words], so there is this hope as if things are gonna change. It was a very hopeful movement it was massive, massive, massive movement, it was an upheaval, like a big hurricane, but it was not a bloody, to my recollection, it never was a bloody revolution. It was a mass movement.

Among the complaints was the emperor's belief that he was above the law, with many doubting his claim to the Solomonic dynasty, which legitimized the rule of the emperor, that it was a divine right, as it was believed that the emperors of Ethiopia were direct decedents of Menelik I, the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Also, there was growing disapproval due to the belief that the emperor was squandering the country's resources for

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<sup>60</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 54-55.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

his personal benefit. There were accusations made by the press that he had committed treason, stating that he allowed the Italians to invade with minimal resistance.<sup>62</sup> He was also accused of intentionally trying to conceal the extent of the Wollo famine in the previous year, which will be discussed in the subsequent section. Even though the protest towards the monarchy came from different classes, professions and ethnicities, there was no viable politically organized group to lead the revolution.<sup>63</sup> In fact, political activities had been suppressed which reflected the absolute rule of the emperor. However, students and teachers effectively comprised the mainstay of the emerging political groups, though operating clandestinely.<sup>64</sup> And the Derg, who were not familiar with politics, “might never have sponsored a revolution had the political ingredient not been added by the radical students and teachers, particularly those from abroad, who on hearing the political crisis rushed home to participate”.<sup>65</sup>

The final blow to Haile Selassie occurred on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1974, the day before he was dethroned. The Derg forced him to watch “The Hidden Famine”, a documentary by British filmmaker, Jonathon Dimbley. The film spliced scenes of the 1973 Wollo famine,

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<sup>62</sup> The mid-1930s saw the invasion of the Italians as a way to rectify the humiliation for their defeat in Adwa in 1896, a victory which secured Ethiopia's independence throughout the colonial period. Italy's invasion in 1935 saw the use of mustard gas and other modern warfare techniques to defeat Ethiopia after months of fighting. A year after the invasion, Haile Selassie and his family fled to England, thus embittering the Ethiopian people towards their monarch. See, Alberto Sbacchi, “Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1936),” in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghait and Mia Fuller, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

<sup>63</sup>Pietro Toggia, "The Revolutionary Endgame of Political Power: The Genealogy of 'Red Terror' in Ethiopia," *African Identities* 10 (2012): 266.

<sup>64</sup>David Ottaway and Marina Ottaway, *Ethiopia: Empire in Revolution* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1978), 57.

<sup>65</sup>Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 12. When questioned about the overthrowing and subsequent treatment of Haile Selassie, Mengistu affirms his dethronement was necessary as Ethiopia under the emperor was “very backward, archaic and feudalist” and that he was not responsible for his death since it was believed that he was killed shortly after imprisonment. He gave further explanation by stating that “he was 80 years old and a very weak man. We tried our best to save him but we could not keep him”. Whether he was killed or not, Haile Selassie's death in 1975, legitimized and finalized the Derg's mission to depose the monarchy. Also see, "BBC News." *Mengistu Defends 'Red Terror'*. December 28, 1999. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/581098.stm>, accessed March 3, 2015.

which ravaged north-eastern Ethiopia and killing thousands, with scenes of the emperor and his inner circle living a luxurious life, drinking champagne and feeding his dogs from a silver tray. Juxtaposing the images was meant to expose Haile Selassie as splurging while thousands suffered. This was also publicly broadcasted and the following morning, the Derg declared over the radio a proclamation of his deposing. This was publicly announced before Haile Selassie was summoned into a room where it was read to him, thus he was the last to know.

The Derg were composed of a small number of military men who had no political agenda of their own, piggybacking onto the growing demonstrations that involved the Ethiopian masses. The students that were behind the revolution had not organized themselves into a political party, although they were influenced by leftist political ideologies. In the immediate post-revolution era, the Derg felt pressure to come up with their own political organization as civilian groups, such as the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) and the All Ethiopian Socialist Movement (Meison), who were becoming politicized and began propagating through pamphlets and newspapers on how they intended to reshape Ethiopia.<sup>66</sup> Without an ideology of their own, delegates within the Derg were sent abroad to find one that was suitable for Ethiopia; it would not be declared until the year's end. As a precursor to their socialist ideology, the Derg adopted the slogan *Ethiopia Tikdem* (Ethiopia First) in July 1974, to indicate to the masses that “guaranteeing the fundamental rights of the people and reforming the nation were the priorities, and not adherence to a

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<sup>66</sup> Edmond J. Keller, "State, Party, and Revolution in Ethiopia," *African Studies Review* (1985): 3. Also see, Gebru Tareke, *The Ethiopian Revolution: War in the Horn of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 87. Tareke explains that EPRP was founded in 1972 in Berlin, Germany by two dozen exiled Ethiopian students, while Mesion was founded in 1968. Both groups developed out of the international student movements that began in the 1960s and remained clandestine until revolutionary activity in Ethiopia began to take shape.

specific ideology".<sup>67</sup> In addition to these promises, the slogan was accompanied by *Ya Le Minim Dem* (without bloodshed).<sup>68</sup> By years' end, the Derg launched the National Campaign for Development through Cooperation, or alternatively known as Zemeche. The purpose of this campaign was for all students from grades 10 to 12 and their respective teachers to spend a year in the countryside explaining the revolution to the farmers and peasants but more so, to gain rural residents support the Derg. Among the tasks of the campaigners were giving literacy classes, building infrastructure as well as schools and clinics. The students, realizing that the Derg had self-serving motivations behind the campaign, were resistant towards it; however, they recognized that they too were able to promote and rally support against the Derg, so went along with the Zemeche.<sup>69</sup> In another effort to legitimize themselves, the Derg economic policies took shape by seizing full control over banks, insurance companies and large-scale manufacturing industries as well as nationalizing all rural property by early 1975. This was considered another blow to the former government since the feudal lords no longer owned their own land, which served as their source of power.<sup>70</sup>

The dethronement of Haile Selassie ended Ethiopia's monarchical rule and began the seventeen year rule of Mengistu. In addition to destroying the power of the monarchy, the Derg was unparalleled in revolutionizing the social order of Ethiopian society. Prior to 1974, Orthodox Christianity was Ethiopia's official religion, but the revolution marked the first time that Christians and Muslims were declared equals, that the church and state were

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<sup>67</sup>Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 14.

<sup>68</sup>Ghelawdewos Araia, *Ethiopia: The Political Economy of Transition* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 80.

<sup>69</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 58.

<sup>70</sup> Edmond J. Keller, "State, Party, and Revolution in Ethiopia," *African Studies Review* (1985): 4.

separated and that the feudal system had collapsed with land expropriated from landlords and made available for the peasantry.<sup>71</sup> There were also calls for dismissals of high official positions within government ministries and departments.<sup>72</sup> The emergence of the Derg ended the century's long Christian monarchy with Mengistu being the first leader to not claim Solomonic lineage. Thus, this reshaped the whole political landscape.

### **Red Terror**

The revolution was a success; however, the years that followed were rife with ongoing power struggles between the Derg and the imperial government, the Derg and other civilian groups, as well as within its own unit. Mengistu Haile Mariam, who would become leader of the Derg in 1977, was at the center of these power rivalries and sought to eliminate his enemies by simply ordering their deaths. The lack of political organization during the revolution enabled the Derg to fill the void left by the swift removal of Haile Selassie, and in the following two months, Mengistu made an official order to execute the members of the imperial government in addition to dissident members of the Derg. The removal of the imperial government pushed Mengistu a step forward in his pursuit for political power. As the Derg were gaining more momentum and implementing economic and social changes, this shifted the power struggle to exist between the Derg and the student movements which would become civilian based political groups, such as the EPRP and in the early years, Meison. What caused a competition for control to erupt was the Derg's reluctance to share the power with the civilian groups. Since the Derg possessed no political stance of their

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<sup>71</sup>Teshale Tibebu, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia, 1896-1974* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press, 1995), 168.

<sup>72</sup>Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855-1991 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2001), 231.

own, they were willing to “listen to the demands of civilian groups and even to accept some of their advice but not hand over or share power with them,” which resulted in growing civilian opposition.<sup>73</sup>

Mengistu, in a momentous event, declared before a crowd at Meskel Square in May 1976, that “We shall beat back White Terror with Red Terror...Death to the counterrevolutionaries! Death to EPRP!” Following this declaration, he produced two bottles filled with red liquid and smashed them, thereby signifying the blood of his enemies he vowed to spill.<sup>74</sup> Labeling the EPRP as 'White Terror' was meant to position them as counterrevolutionary, that their ideologies conflicted with the Derg and that the EPRP were the enemy of the Ethiopian people. In fact, as the violence persisted, each group proclaimed that their actions were self-defensive against the counterrevolutionary attacks from the other.<sup>75</sup> The remaining years would be marred with widespread torture and killings, disappearances, mass arrests and imprisonments. These and other measures taken by the government had created a sense of fear and paranoia that permeated across Ethiopian communities.

It was not only the Derg or the rebel groups that engaged in violence but also kebeles, which were urban neighbourhood associations created under the Derg to monitor “the re-distribution of housing and rent collection, overseeing the orientation of educational

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<sup>73</sup> Edmond J. Keller, "State, Party, and Revolution in Ethiopia," *African Studies Review* (1985): 4. Not only was the Derg against the civilian groups, but seething animosity grew between them as they shared different outlooks for the future of Ethiopia and it was this power rivalry between these revolutionary groups that ignited the Red Terror.

<sup>74</sup> Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 31.

<sup>75</sup> Pietro Toggia, "The Revolutionary Endgame of Political Power: The Genealogy of 'Red Terror' in Ethiopia," *African Identities* (2012): 272. White Terror primarily involved EPRP and Meison in which students were primarily targeted and executions became rampant. Red Terror was declared by Mengistu as an attack on EPRP, whom they considered to be counter-revolutionary; believing themselves to be revolutionary.

institutions to ensure that they were in line with the revolution”.<sup>76</sup> What complicated matters, was that once the Zemeche had returned from the countryside in 1976, they began to penetrate the kebele. Mengistu armed members of the kebele, believing them to be loyal but some had turned on him. This was the beginning of a frightening time for Ethiopians as violence became both arbitrary and more apparent such that “no one was spared: men or women, young or old were gunned down in broad daylight or dragged out of their homes at night and killed. Bands of men attacked anyone they suspected of holding opinions other than their own”.<sup>77</sup> Emmanuel Mollaligne, a teenager during the regime, remembers that in addition to terror mechanisms, the Derg cadres also framed people stating that “everybody is suspicious[of] each other...there was fake stuff...they throw something [and] if you pick it up, they kill you. They frame people, they drop...valuables, so the rule was don't pick anything, don't say anything”.<sup>78</sup> The power struggle between the Derg and those they considered counterrevolutionary victimized all Ethiopians; it became apparent that the mounting number of dead bodies came to justify their ends. Although few were actively involved, it virtually came down to this very sentiment - “What did it matter if many innocent people were paying for the capture of each 'guilty' one?”<sup>79</sup> The Red Terror would eventually escalate with the Derg's adoption of the (nesta ermija) or 'shoot to kill' policy resulting in thousands of executions and countless dead bodies left on the streets. Anyone suspected of being involved with the EPRP could be shot without question or arrest.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 61.

<sup>77</sup> Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 32.

<sup>78</sup> Emmanuel Mollaligne, interview by Dahay Daniel, Kitchener ON, Canada, May 29, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> René Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, trans. A.M. Berrett (London: Zed Press, 1983), 238.

<sup>80</sup> Melakou Tegegn, "Mengistu's 'Red Terror'," *African Identities* (2012): 262.

The Red Terror is said to have lasted throughout the latter half of the 1970s; however, with Mengistu's full grip of power, the terror did not end until the regime was brought down in 1991. Amidst all the political turmoil within the country, Ethiopia also faced external conflicts with its neighbouring regions. The province of Eritrea sought independence from Ethiopia and Somalia hoped to consolidate the Ogaden region, which makes up the eastern portion of Ethiopia though it is comprised of a large Somali population. These territorial conflicts were a result of the colonial divide set in place by Britain and Italy and therefore, when independence was granted, the peoples of those regions sought to consolidate land they believed was rightfully theirs. Cumulatively, these internal and external conflicts resulted in mass numbers of displaced Ethiopians, hoping to seek refuge in other towns or fleeing the country altogether.

### **Prohibition of Gatherings and New Associations**

In order to govern effectively, the Derg used the divide and rule tactic, instilling in the Ethiopian people the constant feeling of fear and paranoia that resulted in widespread violence. Before 1974, Ethiopian society was informally structured around family, neighbours and religion. Ceremonies and celebrations were fundamental for keeping community spirit and continuously bringing people together for holidays, weddings, funerals, births, as well as the coffee ceremony. They were highly ritualized and gave Ethiopians a sense of identity and a sense of belonging to their respective communities. To destabilize this communal life, the regime decided to restructure society, detaching people from their familiar attachments. Religion, which will be further discussed in the subsequent section, was attacked by the Derg. In 1981, an official document called, "How to Eliminate

Religion from Ethiopia,” was leaked from the Ministry of Information, declaring religion to be “a cancer to the revolution”. The statement was referring to all religions.<sup>81</sup> Simultaneously, societal groups became reorganized and formalized based upon the Derg's socialist visions. In other words, the regime was convinced that “restructuring society into peasant associations, urban dwellers associations, collectivized farms, and party cells would be effective in controlling society”.<sup>82</sup> As a result, a country that prided itself on communal and societal togetherness was quickly transformed into a nation of frightened masses. This divide and rule tactic gave rise to the belief that everybody was being watched to the extent that many could not trust their own family and friends.<sup>83</sup>

Throughout the period, several groups sprung up in opposition to the Derg, many of them reflecting their region or ethnicity. Because of these differences, many of them grew in opposition to each other resulting in constant conflict. Their ideologies varied from being secessionists, nationalists, and socialists. Regardless of their political or ideological goals, they were all considered as an enemy to the regime. Therefore, the Derg aimed at squashing any groups it had labelled as counterrevolutionary: however, its reaction towards these groups spilled over onto the civilian population making it dangerous for ordinary people to have even a benign gathering among friends. Mulugeta Gebru recalls that the simple act of gathering became heavily monitored under Derg rule. By repeating the word "trouble," he emphasized how any form of gathering became dangerous:

If you even stand in groups just chatting, in the streets [points outside as example] chatting there 5, 6 people chatting, you're in

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<sup>81</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 68.

<sup>82</sup> Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 63.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

trouble, you're in trouble, you can't, you can't gather together more... more than four people, you're in trouble...there is trouble, so it, it literally changed the way of life.<sup>84</sup>

Neighbourly relations were instrumental for the creation of group and self-identity. They fostered a sense of belonging and sense of security. People did everything together, but this changed when public gatherings especially among the youth were under scrutiny by the government. Both Daniel Belay and Denny Aschnaki remember growing up as youth and not being allowed to gather publicly with their friends, that gathering for mundane or trivial reasons or to even start up a small business was could lead to trouble:

I remember when we were kids, we were not allowed to sit in the local hangout... in our neighbourhood. They would ask us to disperse. Sitting in a group even as young kids...we were looked as a threat, maybe we're plotting something... they need to control.<sup>85</sup>

I had this idea when I was young, I bought a table tennis in Ethiopia so... [it] actually attracted so many young people coming near and I was making money but immediately the kebele...local administrators came to me and gave me two warnings, 'you have to get rid of this because' at that, first I didn't know what it was, and then they said 'you know what, we don't want these young people hanging around' so immediately they had my mom, literally they warned her 'your son is not listening to us, you need to get rid of this, we don't him to actually having this taking place.'<sup>86</sup>

The only way people could gather safely was under the regime's organized activities. New associations were established altering the informal structures that were previously based on familial, communal, religious or ethnic ties. This meant that people could no

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<sup>84</sup>Mulugeta Gebru, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Denny Aschnaki, interview by Dahay Daniel, Kitchener ON, Canada, May 29, 2016.

longer celebrate or commemorate occasions or events according to tradition. Daniel Belay remembers how these new gatherings were only meant to serve the purpose and vision of the Derg:

The new regime embraced an ideology, which is an eastern ideology, an ideology that was followed by USSR. Now these ideologies are very much followed in a way that undermined cultural and religious practices. Because they came with their own rituals, these regimes have their own rituals, for one thing people were organized by association, by their demographics or profession, or zone. There was a woman's organization, there was youth organization, there was a workers' organization. There was zone number this, or zone number that. Now people who are accustomed to being organized in religious and culture occasion now, they are forced into being organized into those political organization. Now people who are used to do collectively or in an organized manner, cultural and religious practices, now they have to do something else totally opposite, which is getting together, sitting and listening to propagandas, shouting slogans, singing certain songs, culture was pushed aside, religion was pushed aside. If you don't want to participate in that revolutionary or political activity of this new regime, then you can only attract attention to yourself...<sup>87</sup>

Whether people agreed to it or not, they were forced to conform to the regimes' socialist principles and were obligated to participate, in one form or another, in associations and occasions, that celebrated the Derg.<sup>88</sup> Such measures included enforcing Marxist-Leninist ideology on women's associations in their respective kebeles. Some found ways of resisting the indoctrination by not reading the material and pretending to accept the teachings. Others who did align themselves with the ideology believed that it was misconstrued by the Derg

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<sup>87</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 133.

and were against the repressive means of enforcing it.<sup>89</sup> Kebele meetings were mandatory and leaders would go from house to house collecting people or “wait for them when they returned from school or work to take them to meetings”.<sup>90</sup> Failure to comply with the new policies subjected people to persecution; for refusal to participate in the Derg's reorienting of societal organizations immediately meant that they were displaying subversive behaviour and therefore involved in seditious activities. These new organizations were a rejection of a way of life that was deeply rooted in Ethiopian culture:

The identity of the people is the most important element in the process of nation building and economic development. If a political system promotes disintegration, rejects historical values, destroys the culture and language, and attempts to restructure society on a foundation imported from another people, it is bound to fail.<sup>91</sup>

The Derg's attempt to remodel Ethiopia was rejected by many as it was seen as an effort to strip citizens of their sense of cultural and social attachments which compromised the very notion of their identity. One's role in a given community is determined by the role he or she plays in it. When important cultural components were removed from one's day to day life, people's identities became redefined by the government to reflect its ideology and control.

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<sup>89</sup>Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 124. A woman stated that, "I hated the way they push politics. They give us Marx and Lenin books, but I never read them". Another woman opposed the application of the teaching, stating that it was not interpreted or practiced correctly.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 134-135. A woman stated that, "Every week-end they expected us to attend the kebele meetings. I worked in the day and studied at night. They were not satisfied with that and insisted you attend the meetings. They have power and can keep you even at night". Another woman who tried relentlessly to avoid going stated that, "If you don't participate, they think you are against them. Even if you don't agree, you have to participate. I was part of the women's association".

<sup>91</sup>Dawit Wolde Giorgis, *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 1989), 68.

## Suppression of Religion

In 1981, the proposal to remove religion from Ethiopia had been leaked, which was contrary to one of the Derg's initiatives of the revolution: to allow religious freedom throughout Ethiopia. Religion gave Ethiopians a sense of safety and comfort; its removal became one of Derg's mechanisms to detach individuals from society. Until 1974, the official state religion in Ethiopia was Orthodox Christianity and was practiced by more than half of the population. A large minority of Ethiopians followed the Islamic faith since its arrival in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Gradually, through trading settlements, Islam began to diffuse itself into Ethiopian culture.<sup>92</sup> Though the relationship between the two major religious groups was tumultuous, particularly in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, their syncretism meant that “their followers have not found it impossible to join in common religious observances,” taking part in each other's ceremonies.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, there are small numbers Ethiopian Jews, the Falashas, as well as practitioners in the Catholic and Protestant sects, and traditional, indigenous beliefs.<sup>94</sup>

Despite the diversity, religion in one form or another has been deeply rooted in Ethiopian culture. But when the Derg came to power, declaring Ethiopia an atheist state, it caused major disruptions to many of the rituals that were grounded in religion. Daniel Haile recalls the Derg's declaration for religious equality as massive cultural shock for Orthodox Christians, stating that:

Ethiopia was not only feudal country, but also a Christian country...  
Orthodox was the state religion. When the revolution broke out, to

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<sup>92</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 44.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>94</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 68.

the anger and dismay of many Orthodox Christians, they were told that from that day on, they are equal with the Muslims. Ethiopia is no more an island of Christians. That was a big, big shock, [a] cultural shock for a pious Orthodox. They were told that we were equal and while we respect the Eid the holidays are equally respected, that's a big shift.<sup>95</sup>

With the removal of Haile Selassie in 1974, questions arose as to what would become of the Church, since “constitutionally, the church and state enjoyed each other's protection”.<sup>96</sup> The Derg did not immediately go after religious institutions but as violence became more apparent and widespread, religious figures were targeted. An example of this was the removal of the Ethiopian Patriarch Theophilos in February 1976 and his execution three years later. He was accused by the Derg of “crimes against the people” which included “misappropriation of relief funds and illegal accumulation of millions of dollars”. This was announced over the radio, which was under state control, claiming that the Patriarch was appointed by Haile Selassie and not elected by the clergy according to the proper procedure for choosing a Patriarch.<sup>97</sup> This of course was a fallacy as Orthodox Christians would not accept a leader who was not properly elected and neither would the larger Orthodox community, as was the case when the Derg appointed a new patriarch of their own choosing. The removal of Pope Theophilos and the installment of a more compliant patriarch violated the protocol prescribed by the Orthodox Church.<sup>98</sup> The Derg's antagonism towards Pope Theophilos may have stemmed from comments he made before the emperor was removed

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<sup>95</sup> Daniel Haile, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>96</sup> M.K, "How will Church Fare after Selassie," *The Times*, November 16, 1974, 6.

<sup>97</sup> "Patriarch is Deposed by Ethiopian Regime," *The New York Times*, February 19, 1976.

<sup>98</sup> Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 142. The Times published an article *Copts challenge Ethiopia's new Patriarch*, Aug 24, 1976 which discussed that under the protocol, signed by both the Egyptian and Ethiopian Orthodox church, "both must take part in the election and consecration of each patriarch" as agreed upon in 1959. The Coptic Church did not recognize the consecration of the new patriarch deeming the removal of former as both illegal and inhuman.

from power, that the Orthodox Church would not accept the Derg's attempt at secularizing Ethiopia.<sup>99</sup> His unwillingness to cooperate with the new government resulted in his arrest and under Mengistu's orders, the Patriarch was executed in 1979.<sup>100</sup>

To impress upon the seriousness of religion in Ethiopia, the Orthodox faith and the Ethiopian government, prior to 1974, were so interwoven that the monarchy was reliant on the clergy for its legitimacy. The enthronement of the emperor required an anointment of oil as well as the bestowal of the crown, conducted under the authority of the Coptic archbishop.<sup>101</sup> This legitimacy centered on Solomonic lineage, a claim that granted each leader divine rule for having direct lineage to Menelik I, the son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who became the first king of Ethiopia. Article 5 of the 1931 Ethiopian Constitution that was drafted the year following Haile Selassie's crowning in 1930 states that:

By virtue of His Imperial Lineage as well as by the anointment he received, the person of the Emperor is sacred, His dignity inviolate and His power incontestable. He therefore enjoys by right all honors due Him by tradition and in conformity with the present Constitution.<sup>102</sup>

Tradition — being anointed by the church — upheld the monarchs' legitimacy which Haile Selassie reasserted under the constitution, stating that he had “been called, by the grace of God and the unanimous voice of the Ethiopian people, to receive under unction the Crown

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<sup>99</sup>Agence France-Presse, "Ethiopian Military Assails the Emperor," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1974, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 142.

<sup>101</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 152.

<sup>102</sup>The Ethiopian Constitution 1931, Ethiopian Research Council (Washington D.C, 1936) chapter 1, article 5, accessed May 2, 2016 <https://archive.org/details/TheEthiopianConstitution>.

and Throne of the Empire”.<sup>103</sup> Mengistu, having usurped political power, became the first leader with no claim to the Solomonic lineage signifying that he did not depend on the Orthodox Church to legitimize his rule, thus ending a centuries' long tradition. This in itself was a clear statement that religion and government were no longer intertwined.

Even though early on in their struggle for power, the Derg had initially declared a religious tolerance for all faiths -beginning with the separation of church and state- their true stance on religion became clear once they solidified their grip on power. The following is an excerpt of their proclamation declaring religious equality:

The right of every nationality to self-determination will be recognized and fully respected. No nationality will dominate another since the history, culture, language and religion of each will have equal recognition in accordance with the spirit of socialism...There will not be any sort of discrimination among religions.<sup>104</sup>

As the Derg's power became further entrenched, they continued the campaign to “remove the evils of religion,” targeting all faiths practiced in Ethiopia. Even though the desire to stamp out religion contradicted the Derg's earlier declarations of religious equality, they used propaganda to win the support of Ethiopians, until their true intentions became apparent to all. Part of the propaganda was, as Solomon Aklilu remembers, was the promotion of Marxism as a viable replacement to religion:

During the DERG regime ...they started talking down to this [idea of] 'no God' ... and they want, no religion, we don't have religion, we don't this and that. They started propaganda, anti-religion

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<sup>103</sup> The Ethiopian Constitution 1931, Ethiopian Research Council (Washington D.C, 1936) decree, accessed May 2, 2016 <https://archive.org/details/TheEthiopianConstitution>.

<sup>104</sup>Galia Sabar Friedman, "Religion and the Marxist State in Ethiopia: the Case of the Ethiopian Jews," *Religion, State and Society* (1989): 249. This article included the proclamation found in the Programme of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia (NDR) in 1976.

propaganda. Of course Marxism is you know anti-religion anyways Mengistu Haile Mariam he said he's Marxist. He doesn't know anything about Marxist. He just [keeps] calling himself Marxist, and, he doesn't like religion.<sup>105</sup>

In the efforts to suppress religion, Abdulaziz Musa recalls how people became fearful of practicing their faiths, with this fear resulting in less religious activities:

Ethiopia is very religious...especially in the north...Christianity... and in the south and south east, the Muslim and in the south part is the indigenous religion... they interrupt the religion rituals and the young reading Marxism, they turn out to be the, may I say, atheists. They refuse to pray or practice religion and the people, they were fearful of the cadres and they don't practice the cultural ceremony... For the Muslim, Eid being another and Christmas ... Ethiopia has a lot of ... religious ceremonies.<sup>106</sup>

In their mission to suppress religion, they confiscated religious books from churches and monasteries, claiming that “these books support an ideology which made feudal exploitation possible” and proposed a plan to convert “important monasteries and churches into museums 'from which the oppressed masses could draw valuable lessons'”.<sup>107</sup> They reinforced their disdain of the church by accusing the clergy of ownership of land alongside the nobility, thus declaring to the Ethiopian people that, the church too contributed to the oppression of the peasantry under the imperial rule.<sup>108</sup> So in order for the Derg to govern effectively, it aimed to distance the Ethiopian people from religion by presenting it as the cause of their oppression. With the church's declining economic and political influence,

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<sup>105</sup> Solomon Aklilu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Carleton University, April 11, 2016

<sup>106</sup> Abdulaziz Musa, Skype interview by Dahay Daniel, April 24, 2016.

<sup>107</sup> David Cross, "Ethiopian Attack on 'Evil of Religion'," *The Times*, November 15, 1984, 1.

<sup>108</sup> Ghelawdewos Araia, *Ethiopia: The Political Economy of Transition* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995), 11.

support for the church did not diminish amongst practitioners, as well as in other faiths, though as Abdulaziz Musa also remembers, religious practice needed to be done covertly:

They didn't officially by law...abolish it, but this unwritten rule, people scared of going to mosque in our area, the Muslim... they are not free to practice religion. They weren't free to come together ... and ... pray or ask God forgiveness or for what they need...<sup>109</sup>

In contrast to how Islam and Orthodox Christianity were attacked, yet still practiced, Abdulaziz discussed how religious practice within indigenous faiths was prohibited. The example that he provided looks at one in particular, Wadaaga, where its practitioners outwardly disapproved of the Derg and performed rituals to rid the country of them:

[In] my area ... we [have an] Oromo tradition called Wadaaga. That Wadaaga was interrupted. [It] is the indigenous religion [and] in this ritual, people come together, when they come together, there is a priest, called Raabsaa. This Raabsaa conducts the ceremony there...and they ask God for whatever, let's say the dry season, [and] it doesn't rain for awhile, they ask for God to give them rain or there is a war, they ask for [indistinct] because they think war comes from bad deeds or bad spirit. Or they ask for the removal of the DERG, the bad government. So the government knows all ... so they ban it.<sup>110</sup>

In 1978, *The Times* reported on the religious persecutions in Ethiopia. The article discussed that despite the public executions and bodies left on the streets, church sermons could not discuss these violent deaths. People also reportedly prayed silently against church walls, terrified to vocalize their prayers; there was also mention of a woman who collapsed during a church service, crying aloud, while the rest of the congregation disregarded her for fear of

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<sup>109</sup> Abdulaziz Musa, Skype interview by DahayDaniel, April 24, 2016.

<sup>110</sup> Abdulaziz Musa, Skype interview by Dahay Daniel, April 24, 2016.

being punished.<sup>111</sup> Of the circumstances that unfolded in the article, a story detailing the disappearance of an imam further reflects the extent to which the Derg was willing to remove religion:

The imam at the great mosque was hit and fell to the ground seemingly dead. But he later recovered. When the Military Government heard of this they invited him and expressed regret. He was told: "Is it not terrible that anarchists should have stormed your mosque and killed so many innocent people?" The old imam replied: "In our district there are no anarchists. You have done this, but why? There were only poor and simple people standing there with the Koran in their hand. We prayed for rain and for bread, yet you have killed 50 of them. Why?" He received no reply and was allowed to go home. But the next day he was taken away and has not been heard of since.<sup>112</sup>

The Protestant Church was under attack with its adherents persecuted for their perceived anti-revolutionary activities under the guise of religion.<sup>113</sup> Emmanuel Mollaligne stated that Protestant churches were attacked more so than the Orthodox Church, recalling that "some churches were closed, especially evangelical churches, Pentecostal churches. And deliverance [the expulsion of spirits] were not allowed [or] to get together and pray."<sup>114</sup> As opposed to Orthodoxy, that was embedded in Ethiopian culture and government, non-Orthodox churches were deemed as symbolic of Western imperialism and therefore inherently anti-Marxist. Considered a foreign religion, all adherents were labelled as "Pente," which stemmed from the word Pentecostal, and being branded as such was

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<sup>111</sup>Hans Eerik. "Silent Prayers at Church Walls in Addis Ababa," *The Times*, March 22, 1978, 8.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>113</sup>Caroline Moorehead, "Prisoners of Conscience," *The Times*, August 10, 1981, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Emmanuel Mollaligne, interview by Dahay Daniel, Kitchener ON, Canada, May 29, 2016.

enough to land one in prison or be killed.<sup>115</sup>

With the separation of church and state and attacks on those who practiced, the regime aimed at severing the ties between the Ethiopians and their respective religions, and thus their societal ties. Reflecting on this massive cultural change, Daniel Belay mentioned that this had a huge impact on the sense of security and safety that religion had provided:

Religion at that time lost its grip, that's one of the things that you see, when religion is not as powerful as it used to be then people who relied very much on religion for protection, for safety, they don't get that anymore... it has to create this disconnect between the individual and society itself. Society doesn't protect me anymore; religion doesn't protect me anymore, so creating that alienation. In order to do that, the regime has to attack the rituals...<sup>116</sup>

## **Meskel Square**

In the heart of Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, lies Meskel Adebababy (Meskel Square), a square where religious holidays, public gatherings and demonstrations are held. The name derives from the religious holiday, Meskel, observed by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, as the day the cross that Jesus Christ was crucified on was discovered by Queen Helena, the mother of Roman Emperor Constantine in 326 CE.<sup>117</sup> Meskel is celebrated in the month of September, shortly after the Ethiopian New Year, which is on September 11<sup>th</sup>. The

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<sup>115</sup> Donald L. Donham, *Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 144-145. In Aug 10, 1981, the Times published an article on Tsehai Tolessa, a prisoner of conscience and a refugee who was arrested and tortured. Along with her husband, Reverend Gudina Tumsa, they were kidnapped in 1979 and she has since been released, though her husband disappeared. They were members of the Ethiopian Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church. In October 29, 1985, the Times also reported the arrest of Martha Kumsa five years prior. The article stated that "At the time of her arrest she was working for the studio of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church" implying that her involvement in the church resulted in her arrest. It is not known what happened to her.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

<sup>117</sup> A.S.H. Smyth, "Ethiopia's New Millennium," *History Limited Ltd* (2008): 3.

celebration is renowned for its lighting ceremony conducted within both families and communities. It begins very early in the morning as each family lights a bonfire, called the demera, with a torch called a chibo. Once the demera is lit, the chibo is used to bless the family's home and their livestock. Because September marks the end of the rainy season, blessings include wishes for a good harvest and safe travel. The following morning, a gathering is held in the central location of each rural and urban community where a larger demera is lit called the Ate Demera, or bonfire of all bonfires.<sup>118</sup> In Addis Ababa, the central location is Meskel Square, where the Ethiopian Patriarch and the emperor light the demera, with the former offering blessings. The ceremony is accompanied with religious chanting as well as traditional music and dance performances, and from the ashes of the demera, people mark their forehead with the sign of the cross.<sup>119</sup>

Due to the belief that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has remnants of the cross Jesus Christ was crucified on, it is considered one of the most important holidays in the country. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, as it is formally called, dates as far back as two millennia. Christianity arrived in Ethiopia in the 4th century, coinciding with the discovery of the cross' remnants. Christianity was accepted by Emperor Ezana, thus becoming the state religion, and has since been entrenched into Ethiopia's historical and cultural developments, remaining the country's official religion until the end of Haile Selassie's reign. Because the name and the accompanying ceremony were rooted in religion, the Derg renamed Meskel Square to Revolution Square, banning any religious ceremonies from taking place there.

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<sup>118</sup> Solomon Addis Getahun and Wudu Tafete Kassu, *Culture and Customs of Ethiopia* (Greenwood, 2014), 153-154.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-154.

Below is a conversation with Solomon Aklilu about Meskel Square and how the Derg's rebranding of the square use was considered problematic to Christian Ethiopians:

Solomon Aklilu - The head of state in Ethiopia for the first time doesn't go to ceremonies, the holidays, you know... Meskel Adebababy, is Meskel they called Revolution Adebababy or whatever, they changed the names

Dahay Daniel- Oh the, you mean the Meskel Square?

Solomon Aklilu - the Meskel Square, they changed

Dahay Daniel - to Revolution

Solomon Aklilu - to revolution. There was a war between Christians and them and the Christians were saying ' no you cannot do that, this is Meskel Adebababy. They prohibited the demera, you know, have you heard about the demera?

Dahay Daniel - No

Solomon Aklilu - the demera is a fire, where there is Meskel, during Meskel time they put fire ... have you seen that?

Dahay Daniel - no, no

Solomon Aklilu - It's part of the UNESCO tradition now. It's recognized...It's in Meskel, every priest will come out and they will sing, you know, the ... song of David and there will be fire. Big fire. They put big fire and, it's Meskel...you gotta ask your father this thing, you have to know this

Dahay Daniel - he tells me about Meskel but... I never seen

Solomon Aklilu - It's a huge fire...and he prohibited that, for a long long time. Now...actually they're celebrating that

Dahay Daniel - ok

Solomon Aklilu - Mengistu Haile Mariam [laughs] they call him the devil... in the church...<sup>120</sup>

Now that religious activities that were central to most of the traditional and cultural celebrations were officially condemned, events that would take place in public were those that signified the regime's ideology and propaganda. As a symbolic rejection of any religious attachment to the Square, Mengistu stood in front of thousands of people and

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<sup>120</sup> Solomon Aklilu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Carleton University, April 11, 2016

announced its offensive campaign—the war on the EPRP. Meskel Square, a place that was used for religious and cultural gatherings and celebrations, was now transformed into a rallying square to celebrate the Derg's “revolutionary” milestones.

### **State Ban on Mourning**

Prior to the Derg's regime, the sanctity of life was held with utmost reverence, celebrated from the time of birth and honoured and commemorated after death. The traditions and rituals associated with these sacred events were deeply rooted in the Ethiopian culture, although they may differ from region to region. Culturally, grief is expressed collectively and publicly through practices which include, but are not limited to, dressing in black, wailing, crying, beating the chest, pulling the hair, the latter usually expressed by woman grieving intensely. Neighbours bring food and drinks as well as prepare coffee<sup>121</sup> for the bereaved family in order to comfort them and relieve them of any domestic duties, while a public funeral procession allows the community to grieve the passing of one of its members.<sup>122</sup> Mourning and burial practices also vary along religious lines; Islamic traditions require the body to be buried following a washing and shrouding of the body with white cloth, accompanied with the funeral prayers. In Ethiopia, death in one's family is considered as death in the community and it is the responsibility of neighbours to care for the bereaved family while grieving for the loss of a community member. Before the Derg assumed power, Ethiopians sought comfort in their family, friends and neighbours; however, the drastic

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<sup>121</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 100. Interviewee from book stresses the importance of neighbourly relations by stating that "The first day a person dies, everybody comes with food and coffee to share your sadness".

<sup>122</sup> Desta Seyoum, *Death and Mourning Practices in Rural Ethiopia*, June 24, 2015, accessed April 10, 2016, <http://www.rootsethiopia.org/death-and-mourning-practices-in-rural-ethiopia/>.

change in government had altered the way death was perceived and the way people were mourned and buried.<sup>123</sup> Death became a regular occurrence throughout the Derg years with secret and public executions, disappearances, people being tortured to death, as well as air raiding campaigns on rebel-occupied Ethiopian towns and villages in the later years of the regime. People killed on the streets were left there for public display with their family members unable to mourn or retrieve their bodies. The daily violence that ensued under the regime reflected the Derg's disregard for human life. People were tortured for information or confessions, many were summarily executed, and those imprisoned were kept under inhumane facilities that were overcrowded, thus exposing them to diseases. Prohibiting Ethiopians from following their traditional ways of dealing with death was not only a major cultural disruption but also a way of alienating citizens from the comfort of their communities. Similar accounts of this frightening episode were conveyed by different respondents, all of whom had gone through various forms of traumatic experiences. While discussing ways in which the Derg had affected the culture of Ethiopia, Solomon Aklilu stated that the regime's disregard for human life had dramatically altered the societal structure of Ethiopian communities, that the violence carried out by the regime was unheard of:

In Ethiopia, mass murdering like this, never happened before! Never! They killed educated people, of course they are part of the feudal government but - but that doesn't mean you have to kill 60 people...I remember when we were young, when somebody dies, everybody just like, you know, sad and crying and everything else. Right now, people just dead... The whole idea of human life is just minimized, you know. It's not like precious like before

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<sup>123</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 119.

anymore. That is what changed I think in Ethiopia, more than anything.<sup>124</sup>

The ban on mourning included prohibiting neighbours or relatives from providing any comfort or assistance to those directly affected by the Derg's violence. Children who suddenly became destitute as a result of their parents' imprisonment or executions could not be taken care of. This seemingly normal act of compassion towards one's neighbour would be considered an act of political subversion, putting anyone who dared to offer help at risk of their own lives.<sup>125</sup>

Students and youth were principally targeted by the Derg for their involvement in various rebel groups. They were the backbone of the demonstrations that resulted in the dethroning of Emperor Haile Selassie; however, they in turn became hunted as they were considered threats to the military regime, with many labelled as counterrevolutionaries. This factor essentially led to a generation of youth that were either killed or fled the country for fear of persecution or execution setting apart Ethiopia's revolution from many others preceding it as expressed in the following quote: "history offers few examples of revolutions that have devoured their children with such voraciousness and so much cruelty".<sup>126</sup> Expounding on this Yed Gebrezigbher reflects on he witnessed and experienced as a youth, emphasizing that under Derg rule, Ethiopia had undergone its darkest period:

I believe that it's the darkest moment of the Ethiopian history, a lot of youngsters, youth, students is being killed without any trial or justice and they don't know where they've been kept, their dead body or there was sometimes you know, they can't even, the family has the right to take their, their loved one who's been killed

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<sup>124</sup> Solomon Aklilu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Carleton University, April 11, 2016.

<sup>125</sup>Hans Eerik. "Silent Prayers at Church Walls in Addis Ababa," *The Times*, March 22, 1978, 8.

<sup>126</sup> René Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, trans. A.M. Berrett (London: Zed Press, 1983), 257.

by the regime, there was very brutal moment, very the darkest moment of history. I personally saw students being driven away from the city and we don't know where they go and mass killing everywhere...There is no human...organization who's looking after human loss...Amnesty Canada, there is no amnesty international monitoring the situation. A lot of people youths, students, very sad moment. I knew that...for sure, it was a darkest moment of Ethiopian history, I do believe that.<sup>127</sup>

The Derg's state ban on mourning was a clear indication that those killed by the government were not considered human lives but counterrevolutionaries thereby justifying their death. The following story that Daniel Belay recalled from his youth also reveals the Derg's devaluing of life of even those who had died of natural causes:

[It was] considered illegal. It's not just, not only with [a] warning, people can get punished and some even killed. So um the, many, thousands and thousands were killed by the military regime. So you can't cry for the, for, for the dead, let alone bury them, give them the proper burial because if you cry for the dead, even if you show any kind of sadness or wearing black dress, to signify mourning, that means the government will look at it as if you are taking political sides with the dead rather than a family... I remember once there was a funeral procession of uh an older gentleman who died of a natural cause, so again when you see them, the funeral procession passes, there's still you know somberness. You don't see a whole lot of crying uh because you're afraid of the cadres and the military they are around, quietly. The priests had this little incense holder with an ember [censer]. I remember this guy, he's a cadre, a military cadre, he was sitting at a patio of one of the bars. He walks straight to where the priests are, he stops the whole funeral procession, he lit his cigarette from it, and nobody can say anything. If it was now or if it was during the Haile Selassie period, the old time, people would have jumped him and he would have been broken to pieces. See how, he did that deliberately to show that, the scepter

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<sup>127</sup> Yed Gebrezigbher, interview by Dahay Daniel, Kitchener ON, Canada, May 29, 2016.

of power...'what're you gonna do?' so imagine how people become conquered, how they felt conquered uh that-that took place. So you see how religious practices, I mean, the funeral in Adi [short for Adigrat], in Ethiopia, there is no such thing as private funeral. In North America you hear that they announce it, it's going to be family only or friends only. In Adi, you don't even invite for funeral, everybody comes, even those who didn't come for funeral are the ones to be looked at as you know, kind of with uh contempt. So everything is collective, whether it's a time of happiness or sadness, and they are expressed through those practices, those ritualistic activities...<sup>128</sup>

As public grieving for victims of the Derg became punishable to the extent of the mourner themselves being killed, the bereaved had to mourn in silence or in secret which was contrary to their tradition. Regardless of faith, death and religion were intertwined. But the Derg's cruel disregard for human life was affecting the relationship people had with their religion as well as their families and communities. A sense of helplessness was felt as the regime continued to tear apart the threads that bound Ethiopian communities together. Emptiness grew when the regime denied people from reaching out to others for support or comfort.

Ethiopia prided itself as a country of cultural diversity and religious reverence with rituals that incorporated the two, producing unique traditions that have united its people. Before proceeding into a discussion on the coffee ceremony, it was imperative to discuss the Derg's attempt to dismantle culturally based rituals and religion itself as a way to assert their power over Ethiopians. In contrast, the coffee ceremony, as discussed in the final chapter, will demonstrate its effectiveness in keeping people together throughout the turmoil, becoming one of the few ways that helped to retain some sense of togetherness. This

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<sup>128</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

breakdown of historically steeped traditions and their replacement by politically influenced rituals caused many Ethiopians to fear and distrust each other. Although the Derg had employed several measures, this chapter highlighted a few that affected the Ethiopian population as a whole.

## **Chapter Two - The Coffee Ceremony: Myth, Gender and a National Symbol**

While coffee is loved and enjoyed worldwide, it is widely known that Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee, with the beverage named after the region in which it originated, Kaffa, in south-western Ethiopia. However, internationally, much of the historical narrative about coffee begins after it was made available outside of Ethiopia, first into Arabia, then into Europe. There has been contention regarding the historical trajectory of coffee among early travelers and writers, with most anthropologists and historians claiming that coffee is native to Ethiopia, but their dates differ as far as when it first began being consumed. One writer reported that coffee was first used in 1450CE<sup>129</sup> after it was brought to Arabia, while another claims that it was cultivated in Arabia in 575CE and gradually became a popular beverage by the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>130</sup>

While coffee has been consumed for centuries and was popular in the Arabian world, the story of coffee as a beverage of sociability begins with the emergence of the coffeehouse in mid-17<sup>th</sup> century England. The coffeehouse was a thriving and lucrative business that became a place for men to gather and discuss matters related to “trade, literature, metaphysics, philosophy, or politics” over coffee. Dubbed as “penny universities,” coffeehouses allowed men of different social classes and intellectual backgrounds to pay a penny for a cup of coffee and partake in debates or simply read the newspaper.<sup>131</sup> The purpose of highlighting this is to convey the emphasis that has been placed on the consumption of coffee outside of Ethiopia, that its social history has been linked to Europe despite the coffee ceremony's origins and social function throughout Ethiopia. Furthermore,

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<sup>129</sup> John Crawford Esq., "History of Coffee," *The Journal of Statistical Society of London*, (1852), 50.

<sup>130</sup> William Ukers, *All about Coffee* (New York: The Tea and Coffee Trade Journal, 1922), 5.

<sup>131</sup> Iain Gately, *Drink: A Cultural History of Alcohol* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), 139-141.

the ceremony has always been associated with womanhood, which is contrary to the coffeehouse and its association with men. This chapter, though brief, examines the coffee ceremony through a historical lens, looking at key components that combine to make it a symbol of Ethiopian nationalism. The first section will look at the myths surrounding the discovery of coffee and its significance to the Ethiopian historical narrative. Next will be a discussion of the varying ritualistic components of the coffee ceremony and how their convergence over time helps to explain it as an emblem of Ethiopian culture. The third section explores the connection between the coffee ceremony and femininity, which has not been fully understood or explained. The last two sections examine the steps and purpose of the coffee ceremony, synthesizing the different cultural elements so as to produce a cohesive overview of how it is practiced throughout Ethiopia.

### **Coffee Myths**

There are a number of stories surrounding the origins of coffee with perhaps the most well-known being the story of the shepherd named Kaldi who, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE, noticed his goat feeding on coffee beans and later exhibiting an excited behaviour, due to its stimulating properties. Kaldi then ate some of the beans and felt the effects himself. In his excitement, he brought the beans to a monk who disapproved of them and threw the coffee beans into fire. The aroma from the roasting coffee beans prompted the monk to rake the beans from the fire, grind them and dissolve them in hot water, making the first coffee.<sup>132</sup> This story illustrates a number of significant aspects, such as how the stimulating effects of coffee were accidentally discovered, how the first coffee beverage was created as well as

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<sup>132</sup>Metasebia E. Yoseph, "A Culture of Coffee: Transmediating the Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony" (M.A. diss., Georgetown University, 2013), 28.

making religious reference through the character of the monk, indicating religious practice in Ethiopia in the 9th century. Another myth tells the story of three starving men who were wandering through a desert looking for God with the hopes that food would fall from the sky. When God revealed himself to the three men, he offered salvation in the form of qat (plant) and coffee. The names of the three men – Abol, Atona and Baraka – have been infused into the coffee ritual by becoming the name of each step of the ceremony, which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent sections.<sup>133</sup>

The Oromo have their own story of how coffee originated which differs from the more traditional story of the excited goat. The story begins with the death of the first man and out of his grave, coffee is sprouted, by “the tears of Waqa (God)”. Two very important elements are derived from that story, the first being that this man was believed to be the son of Waqa. Secondly, since it was coffee that sprouted, it is considered to be the “the oldest of all things” having grown from “a place of blessing”.<sup>134</sup> Regardless of how it came to be, the coffee ceremony has become an important symbol of Ethiopian nationality as well as Ethiopian unity, practiced throughout the country with minor differences that reflect the diverse culture of the various ethnicities and religions. These stories, whether accurate or not, reveal a long historical tradition that reflects the strong attachment that coffee has with the Ethiopian culture.

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<sup>133</sup> Metasebia E. Yoseph, "A Culture of Coffee: Transmediating the Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony" (M.A. diss., Georgetown University, 2013), 28. Yoseph references the work of Dr. Berhanu Abeba's *Mythological and Historical Background of Coffee*, (*Kaffa Coffee*, 1998): 13-20.

<sup>134</sup> Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, Amal Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2004): 677.

## History of the Coffee Ceremony

The coffee ceremony has been practiced throughout Ethiopia for many generations. However, its history has not been documented or identified. Further complicating this is the fact that this tradition is considered to be both ancient and modern.<sup>135</sup> Literature on the ceremony has only speculated its origins, and Ethiopians interviewed for this research have either claimed not to know the history or have shared their own interpretation of it. It has been argued that it may have originated either in Ethiopia and migrated to Arabia where it was refined and brought back, or that it developed in Arabia and was adopted by Ethiopians and refined to reflect their culture.<sup>136</sup> An indication of this connection are the words used in the coffee ceremony, like jebena (pot), abol (first) and baraka (blessing) which were adopted from Arabic.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, there have also been accounts that the ceremony originated with the Oromo ethnic group:

This coffee ceremony is basically an Oromo, an Oromo specific culture but an Oromo cultural trait rather, which was later widely spread to all ethnic groups...So I'm pretty sure, they, it's a cult called Atété. So you got Atété, there is also this a goddess, a feminine goddess...Because basically the ceremony a feminine thing so there is for this feminine thing, there is also a feminine god, goddess. So that's some relation with the Oromo's. That's what I know.<sup>138</sup>

Before my initial research, I assumed that the coffee ceremony was as varied as Ethiopia itself; however, it became apparent that the ceremony has minor iterations and is

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<sup>135</sup> Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 516.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 523.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

<sup>138</sup> Daniel Haile, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016. This was also mentioned in research done on Ethiopian women living in the United States in 2004. In the article, *Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee*, the authors' tie together the origins of coffee from the Oromo area with the ceremony first performed by them because it had indigenous and Islamic connections, therefore considered taboo among the Christians living in the northern regions.

therefore practiced more or less in the same way throughout the country. What further mystifies the origin of the coffee ceremony is the fusion of different elements that make up the ceremony despite their functions in other cultural or religious events and occasions. For example, incense has become so integral to the coffee ceremony, that regardless of ethnic or religious group, it is agreed by many “that its absence”...“ negated the validity of a proper ceremony”.<sup>139</sup> One of the widely known traditional beliefs includes that of the zar: spirits that are believed to be able to possess people until they are appeased by special offerings.<sup>140</sup> The zar has been associated with many Ethiopian ethnic groups as well as the three monotheistic religions that are practiced.<sup>141</sup> Behavioural or physical changes, such as illness, indicate to others that a person is possessed and in need of an exorcism. Special services are needed to rid the person of the zar and large amounts of incense are burnt, accompanied in some cases with roasting coffee beans, so that together, “the aroma can be inhaled, to stimulate recitations and prayers,” releasing the spirit from the person.<sup>142</sup> Grass, which is used to decorate the coffee ceremony, has also been “used for purification rituals among the Dorze and Guji” two ethnic groups that live in the southern regions of Ethiopia, where it is placed “on the floor in ceremonies to exorcise spirits”.<sup>143</sup> Additionally, among the people in southern Ethiopia, grass is also considered to be a symbol of authority and can be used for

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<sup>139</sup>Jennifer A. Brinkeroff, "Being a Good Ethiopian Woman: Participation in the "Buna" (Coffee) Ceremony and Identity" (Ph.D diss., Arizona State University, 2011), 102. Brinkeroff came to this conclusion from her very own female respondents. In my own interviews, Denny Aschnaki stated that the "coffee ceremony without the presence of, frankincense is not a ceremony at all."

<sup>140</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 48.

<sup>141</sup> Monika D. Edelstein, "Lost Tribes and Coffee Ceremonies: Zar Spirit Possession and the Ethno-Religious Identity of Ethiopia Jews in Israel," *Journal of Refugees Studies* (2002): 157.

<sup>142</sup> Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 526.

<sup>143</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 51.

betothals and to make offerings.<sup>144</sup> In some observances, the practice of all participants taking in the aroma of the roasted coffee beans was used to please the spirits, a feature which is characteristic of the coffee ceremony. Regardless of ethnicity, religious and spiritual practices have been deeply infused into Ethiopian culture. In addition to this, different ethnic groups have been in contact with each other throughout Ethiopia's history, therefore the coffee ceremony as one national symbol appears to be an infusion of different cultural elements. As mentioned above, the origin of the coffee ceremony is difficult to pinpoint, but it seems that in its present state, it is a result of spiritual and cultural influence.

### **Coffee and Womanhood**

Although both men and women enjoy the coffee ceremony, it is primarily linked with Ethiopian femininity. But how does a tradition so steeped into Ethiopian culture become a marker of womanhood? The answer still remains unclear, although the ceremonial practice of coffee has been associated with the female goddess known as Atété. Serving multiple functions, she brings women together to celebrate, commemorate, display reverence to and to ask of blessings. Similarly, the coffee ceremony is practiced in that manner. The female deity is predominately found within the Oromo group of Southern Ethiopia. An example of a ceremony that is centered on Atété is one that promotes fertility.<sup>145</sup> Among the Nonno, of the northern Shoan Oromo group, women within their neighbourhoods gather annually on a rotation system, meaning that a single woman is in charge of giving the feast each year. Preparing for it takes two years and the woman is

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<sup>144</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 51.

<sup>145</sup> Solomon Addis Getahun and Wudu Tafete Kassu, *Culture and Customs of Ethiopia* (Greenwood, 2014), 45.

required, in that time, to save butter and avoid consuming milk, crossing rivers, borrowing fires and to always sleep at home. The ceremony itself involves the 'slaughtering'<sup>146</sup> of coffee, which is the first bite of a coffee bean roasted in butter. This signifies the consummation of a newly married couple, although the ritual is performed by the woman only.<sup>147</sup> Its link to femininity is exhibited by the gathering of women in a ritual meant to bless their fertility and labour, which is solely a female experience. This gathering of women around a deity may have gone beyond spirituality to what is more commonly found in today's coffee ceremony — a time for women to get together to celebrate an occasion, for commemoration and to offer and accept blessings, although Abdulaziz Musa considers it to be a dying tradition:

There is a tradition called Atété... Atété, was the coffee ceremony too, the coffee and butter... And what happened is in ancient times, the Oromos, they have two ceremonies. One is like what I said Wadaaja which is a national ceremony and the other is family ceremony is called Atété. But that tradition, I think [it] died out now...Like my grandfather's mother used to do that but now it's died out. It's very religious for Oromo, for that's indigenous religion... it's to ask their God called Waaqa, Waaqa means God...They ask their God most of the time, if the rain didn't come or if there is war or if there is conflict within tribes, one tribe to another or for the dead people, let's say my grandfather, I just want to pray for my grandfather, things like that...<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ethnic groups from Southern Ethiopia participate in the coffee slaughtering or bun-qalle. Among the Garri, the coffee slaughtering is equivalent to the sacrificing of livestock for religious occasions. For more information, see: Getatchew Kassa, "A descriptive account of coffee slaughter (Bun-Qalle) ceremony of the Garri of southern Ethiopia," *Proceedings of the First National Conference of Ethiopian Studies*: Addis Ababa, 1990), 13-28.

<sup>147</sup> Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, Amal Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2004): 685.

<sup>148</sup> Abdulaziz Musa, Skype interview by Dahay Daniel, April 24, 2016.

The Atété ceremony also has been observed among the highland Arsi of central Ethiopia, as a gathering of women in a neighbourhood type court, where women or men who have offended their female neighbours are brought together to repair the strained relationship through a “performance of convivial ritual”.<sup>149</sup> Just as the Atété ceremony is held to bless women's fertility, coffee is also central to the reconciliation ceremony where the participating women consume the butter roasted coffee beans as part of the festival. As in other religious or cultural ceremonies, coffee plays a important role in bringing women together.

### **Steps of the Coffee Ceremony**

The coffee ceremony is arguably one of the most distinct features of Ethiopian culture, done so in a fashion that, in a manner of speaking, is strictly Ethiopian. Highly ritualized, the gathering for coffee follows a call and response protocol. It is imperative that the host and the participants understand their respective roles and contribute to its reproduction each time; otherwise the ceremony will not be fulfilled. That is to say, each step prescribed must be completed or else the coffee ceremony may be considered unsatisfactory. The elaborate set-up of the ceremony components begins the over hour long gathering as the preparation itself is considered crucial to the ceremony. Usually, long pieces of grass are laid out on the floor to decorate the area where the coffee will be prepared. Though not considered a necessity, grass is usually used by those who have both access and the finances to obtain it. In recent years, synthetic grass has been created in lieu

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<sup>149</sup> Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 525. Pankhurst includes a passage from British anthropologist who observed the ritual in 1968-69.

of its natural alternative, which will be discussed in the following sections. Above the grass lies a small two-tier table called the rakabote. Miniature, handle-less and decorative cups called sini are placed on the top level of the rakabote and beside it are the coal stove, coffee grinder and incense. Arguably the most important feature of the ceremony is the jebena, the coffee pot. The jebena is made from clay and has a round bottom with a narrow spout and a handle on the side. Its shape and design are reflective of the ethnic identity of the host, whether it has a large bottom or an additional spout to pour out the coffee. While certain elements of the coffee ceremony can be tweaked, modernized or all together left out, the jebena has remained the center piece throughout Ethiopia and abroad.<sup>150</sup> The materials used for the coffee ceremony, particularly the jebena, are treasured by Ethiopian women with the following conversation with three friends, Daniel Haile, Efreem Mesegena, and Mulugeta Gebru discussing the relationship between a woman and her jebena:

Daniel Haile - you know what, let me tell you, in my own personal experience, one time when I was just on the verge of adolescence, I was so angry with my mom. So, the only thing I could, I could punish my mom since I can't, I can't fight her  
Dahay Daniel - mhmm  
Daniel Haile - is to go and destroy  
Efreem Mesegena - the jebena  
Daniel Haile - the jebena and [laughs]  
Mulugeta Gebru - [cuts in] WOW! That's a crime  
Dahay Daniel- that is a crime [laughs]  
Daniel Haile- you know what, she hasn't talked to me until her death  
Mulugeta Gebru - yea, you serious?  
Daniel Haile- yea, yea  
Mulugeta Gebru - ohh  
Daniel Haile - she stopped talking to me.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Jennifer A. Brinkeroff, "Being a Good Ethiopian Woman: Participation in the "Buna" (Coffee) Ceremony and Identity" (Ph.D diss., Arizona State University, 2011), 106.

<sup>151</sup> Daniel Haile, Efreem Mesegena, Mulugeta Gebru interview, by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, June 6, 2016.

Surely not the response he hoped for or expected but this exemplifies the importance the jebena is to the ceremony and for the woman. Once everything is prepared and participants have gathered, the woman hosting begins by first cleaning the raw beans by checking for any impurities and then roasting them on the coal stove. Like the jebena, the roasting technique also varies from simply shaking the pan over the heat while lifting and placing it down on the stove, to stirring the beans while the pan rests over the heat. Once the woman determines that the beans are ready to grind, she walks to each participant with the roasted beans, allowing them to take a whiff of the smell by cupping their hands and motioning it towards their face. The beans may be kept in the pan or transferred onto a woven straw fan, with these variations depending on the region.<sup>152</sup>

Traditionally, the roasted beans are manually ground with a grinder and poured into the jebana followed by water where it boils, and when the coffee is brewed, the host begins pouring it into the cups and simultaneously, incense is burned, creating an aromatic blend that fills the room. The ceremony is a three-step process. The first round is called *abol* or *awol* and the coffee brewed in this step is both the strongest and tastiest. This step could set the tone for the ceremony as it has its own rituals that need to be satisfied. An example of this is mainly seen in the northern region of Ethiopia where Daniel Belay and Mulugeta Gebre both grew up:

The coffee has to be complimented. Sometimes they wait to be complimented, if nobody compliments them, the coffee, sometimes some women, they would roast the coffee again and grind it again because they will assume that their coffee was not good.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 517.

<sup>153</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

In some tribe, in Tigray, in Tigray tribe I think, if you taste coffee, the first time, if you don't tell them 'this coffee is to'om [tasty in Tigrinya]... if you don't tell them that coffee is very good and very nice...they will keep doing it, all day, some. Another thing ... it's like a woman's qualification of... making good coffee, because everybody is not doing good coffee...<sup>154</sup>

The performer of the coffee ceremony is not the only one that needs to ritualize the ceremony; the practitioners themselves are obligated to carry out the traditional functions that make up the entirety of the ceremony. So in the northern region, specifically in Tigray, it is imperative among fervent coffee drinkers that a woman's coffee be complimented early in the ceremony. Once the coffee is brewed and incense is burned, the coffee is poured into the *sini*, always from high and without spilling, and served to all participants. The coffee ceremony in the south can be taken with butter and moving further north may drink it with sugar, salt or black. Following the first round, more water is added to the *jebena* and boiled to make a slightly diluted coffee, with this step called *hulatena*, *thani*, *tona*, *tola* or *kelay*.<sup>155</sup> And finally, there is *baraka*, meaning the blessing, the last step of the ceremony. Again, water is added to the coffee pot and boiled, and the participants drink the weakened coffee. In this final round, as the name suggests, blessings are given to the host in a number of ways.<sup>156</sup>

At the end after the coffee is concluded, whoever is serving it...would get some sort of blessing 'may you grow healthy and prosper, may you be good at school' you know, that's one of the blessing by the way, uh 'may you be smart at school' 'may you grow' and you know 'may we see your kids' ... if the one who is hosting it

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<sup>154</sup>Mulugeta Gebru, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>155</sup>Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 517. *Kelay* was stated by one of the interviewees as the Tigrinya variant of the second step.

<sup>156</sup>Jennifer A. Brinkeroff, "Being a Good Ethiopian Woman: Participation in the "Buna" (Coffee) Ceremony and Identity" (Ph.D., Arizona State University, 2011), 108.

is a young woman, she will get a lot of blessing. um, if it is an older woman, and all that you know, kind of, manners of saying thank you, um you know, appreciating the honour, and so on and so forth, so it is a blessing, it has to be blessed...<sup>157</sup>

Then you have the third one, which you are not even supposed to finish, maybe you have a taste but everybody has to sit until the final, until the baraka. And once you have the you know a sip, maybe 2-3 times sip of the baraka and everybody what do you call that? Baraka...everybody blesses, blesses the house, blesses the person who made the coffee.<sup>158</sup>

Whether or not a person drinks from each round is dependent on the varying traditions in Ethiopia. Within the Oromo community, a person may drink one cup and stop or complete the whole ceremony; however, it is not acceptable to drink two cups.<sup>159</sup> On the part of the participant, there is an obligation to fulfill all the steps of the ceremony; therefore each person needs to drink from each round. The whole ceremony can take between an hour to an hour and half and is done daily, if not multiple times a day.

### **Purpose of the Coffee Ceremony**

Throughout the country, the coffee ceremony serves to bring people together, primarily women, to discuss their daily lives, their families, to gossip; nonetheless, it is always a social gathering. It is a time to relax and to take a break from the stresses of daily life. Done on a daily basis, it forges a strong bond between neighbours as it conveys a sense of ritualism and hospitality since it is performed in a particular fashion that needs to be

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<sup>157</sup>Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

<sup>158</sup>Mulugeta Gebru, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>159</sup>Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, Amal Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2004): 697.

satisfied each time. In addition to simply socializing, the coffee ceremony has been embedded in several functions; whether it is to celebrate, honour or grieve, such functions include weddings and name giving ceremonies for boys.<sup>160</sup> The coffee ceremony, though ritualistic, is also fluid “that by incorporating, in a typically Ethiopian syncretic manner, elements from several religious beliefs, it provides a sort of insurance that all possible deities have been accommodated”.<sup>161</sup> Among Ethiopian Christians, the coffee ceremony has been part of the celebration of the birth of St. Mary, which is celebrated on the first of every month and particularly the first day of Genbot (May/June) which is believed to be her actual birthday.<sup>162</sup> Soothsayers read the remaining coffee grounds after everyone has finished drinking. Efreem Mesegena explains this practice stating that, “the coffee...cup...they put it like this and they read (uses hand to show how coffee cup is turned upside) [and] they entertain themselves”.<sup>163</sup> Within the Oromo Muslim community, prayer is central to the ceremony and can include a blessing for the living or dead or a prayer for forgiveness, well-being and for qualms to be settled.<sup>164</sup> Expounding on the theme of problem solving Solomon Aklilu tells the story of how the coffee ceremony was used to bring peace among his mother's squabbling friends:

You can solve social issues in a coffee ceremony. I remember my neighbours, my mom, she called both of them, they both fought something silly... she put them together... my mom said “That's it, stop it' 'kiss each other now' (laughs), you know, she just created

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<sup>160</sup> Rita Pankhurst, "The Coffee Ceremony and the History of Coffee Consumption in Ethiopia," *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIII<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (1997): 525-526.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 536.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., 517.

<sup>163</sup>Efreem Mesegena, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>164</sup> Janet Yedes, Robbin Clamons, Amal Osman, "Buna: Oromo Women Gathering for Coffee," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* (2004): 691. To expound on this, the authors include quotes that state that when Oromo women gather together for coffee, usually an elder, a prayer is said" for forgiveness, for the dead, for everyone that comes - if she has a problem may it be solved".

peace between, they fought and they didn't talk for 4-5 days, my mom brought them to stop it and that's it...So there are a lot of things that happen in coffee. When you drink coffee, ok, let's get peace now, that's it, it's done, passed. Let's go forward.<sup>165</sup>

The daily gatherings for coffee provide the opportunity for neighbours to know each other intimately since it is a time to openly discuss personal matters. In these discussions, marriage suggestions between children of the participants may be brought up so, in a sense, the ceremony serves a match-making function where people say, “I want my son to marry your daughter”.<sup>166</sup> The communal bond that is forged in a coffee ceremony may eliminate the awkwardness of finding out information about a potential bride or groom since that has been shared over the course of many gatherings. This section highlighted a few examples of how the coffee ceremony is used; however, the social and familial issues that arise during a coffee ceremony are exhaustive. The following section elaborates on particular functions of the coffee ceremony and its relation to the Derg, specifically how it was used to counter the radical measures that were implemented as well as how it evaded prohibition. First examined is the coffee ceremony as being a gendered practice and how that in itself prevented it from being targeted by the Derg given its function as a means of social gathering. Second, it will explore how the ceremony provided relief to those affected by the regime's atrocities; it was a comforting space for expressing sympathy and had therapeutic properties for being one of the few places people could still share their grievances. The coffee ceremony was also a place to share information at a time where news was controlled

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<sup>165</sup> Solomon Aklilu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Carleton University, April 11, 2016.

<sup>166</sup> Solomon Aklilu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Carleton University, April 11, 2016.

and censored by the state. The ceremony, therefore, remained a place of cultural continuation in the midst of cultural disruption.

### **Chapter Three - The Coffee Ceremony and Cultural Continuity**

For the Derg, religious and cultural repression was seminal to gaining and maintaining power. It was used to strike fear and suspicion in the hearts of many Ethiopians, as well as to ensure full government control. But as the culture of togetherness was being attacked during the Derg's attempt to destabilize society, the coffee ceremony—one form of traditional gathering—remained relatively intact. This chapter explores how the coffee ceremony became a mechanism to exercise cultural continuity, to comfort one another, to share contempt for the regime, and to successfully evade the Derg's repressive measures. The first section will focus on how the important role the coffee ceremony played was overlooked by the government, although it was often monitored along with all other social activities. Because it was a household ritual primarily conducted by adult or older women, and was neither public nor the kind of practice commonly followed by youth, the coffee ceremony received less hostile attention from the regime. Secondly, the ceremony, as a semblance of togetherness, gave Ethiopians the opportunity to have an avenue to comfort one another by allowing them to mourn in secret. After the revolution, the coffee ceremony served as a coping mechanism amidst the tragedies of this new order. Lastly, the coffee ceremony, already a place to share information, became the means to vent feelings about the Derg, albeit with some self-censorship. In other words, as Derg rule continued to create fear and paranoia among family, friends and neighbours, the ceremony allowed many to conduct honest political discussions and to express contempt against government measures. Among these discussions were issues such as the economy, in particular the increase in coffee prices. This was somehow inciting public reaction because it affected the affordability and hence the frequency of the time-honoured practice of consuming coffee.

## Outside the Derg's Gaze - A Gendered Practice

Throughout the Derg regime, as students and intellectuals continued to be targeted and many forms of social gatherings were prohibited to discourage subversive activities, the coffee ceremony continued as a central space of communal life. Reflecting on the reasons as to why the ceremony eluded the eyes of Derg cadres, Daraje Leiyu states that it was due to the fact that it is a gendered practice and one that is commonly done at home among older women. Accordingly, this appears to have played a role in its preservation and continuity:

[People didn't] stop gathering for the coffee ceremony, because it's not the youngsters that get together. The mothers, the old people, they are getting together, so the Derg regime is not looking for the old people or the mothers, the Derg regime is looking for the youngsters to go for the war, for recruiting, some people are hiding, some youngsters are hiding, from Derg regime because they don't want to go to war. So I don't think [the coffee ceremony was] affected.<sup>167</sup>

Despite ethnic and religious diversity in Ethiopia, there is a common trend across the country of imposed gendered roles. Though traditional roles are clearly defined in Ethiopian culture, women have worked outside the home and have participated in armed combat, so there are areas where gender roles are not as rigid. The coffee ceremony, on the other hand, is strictly a woman's domain throughout Ethiopia. The following analysis illustrates this through a synthesis of the coffee ceremonies practiced in northern, central and southern Ethiopia.

Examining Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the sexual division of labour, he states that, “The biological difference between the sexes, i.e. between the male and female bodies, and,

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<sup>167</sup>Daraje Leiyu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Kitchener ON, Canada, May 29, 2016.

in particular, the anatomical difference between the sex organs, can thus appear as the natural justification of the socially constructed difference between the genders, and in particular of the social division of labour".<sup>168</sup> The coffee ceremony in itself reflects the social division of labour in Ethiopia for gendered division, since the act of performing it "reinforces a culturally sanctioned womanhood".<sup>169</sup> Its daily practice exposes girls to the ceremony at an early age and as they approach pre-adolescence, they begin to play an active role by retrieving anything that may be required, for example, so as to alleviate the woman conducting the ceremony from having to get up herself. The following conversation explores how Mihret Adela, a woman who is now in her late-twenties, began learning how to perform the ceremony as a young girl:

Dahay Daniel- When did you learn how to prepare or perform the coffee ceremony?

Mihret Adela - 8, 9 and then 10 around there I was able to prepare myself

Dahay Daniel - ok

Mihret Adela - 8,9, I help out with providing them with tools or whatever the things that we use

Dahay Daniel - ok

Mihret Adela - but 10, because, you're using fire

Dahay Daniel - yea

Mihret Adela - and you can't, it's dangerous unless you know your way around it

Dahay Daniel - so by age 10, you were able to?

Mihret Adela - yea I could do the coffee ceremony, but we mostly, have house help so mostly she does it, like I do when we have an event or sort of like a family reunion

Dahay Daniel - ok, so the house help does it on a day to day

Mihret Adela - yea on a daily basis, yea

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<sup>168</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 11.

<sup>169</sup> Thera Mjaaland, "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony: Woman's Agency in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia," *Årboksredaktionen in Betwixt and Between Sosialantropologistudentenesårbok*. (University of Oslo, 2004), 71.

Dahay Daniel - and someone else would do it?  
Mihret Adelaḥu - we help, we still help her out like when she does it, like we give her the things she would need  
Dahay Daniel - mhmm  
Mihret Adelaḥu - if she asks us to go and grab, because we are kids  
Dahay Daniel - yea  
Mihret Adelaḥu - and the young ones are for... if you can't make it, like you have to, like that's my mom, like you have to help out  
Dahay Daniel - ok, I wish I've seen it many times, but I never learned how to do it  
Mihret Adelaḥu -it's never too late [laughs]  
Dahay Daniel - yea [laughs] hopefully one day and what was the experience for you like when you were learning how to do it  
Mihret Adelaḥu - it was exciting at first  
Dahay Daniel - mhmm  
Mihret Adelaḥu - like you know how things are like when you are learning how to do anything, it could be anything  
Dahay Daniel - mhmm  
Mihret Adelaḥu - you get excited like, more into it, it was exciting for me.  
Dahay Daniel - ok, how important is it for girls to learn it? Is it something that makes, or makes you a woman I guess?  
Mihret Adelaḥu - in that way, I wouldn't say, it's very like, it's a must  
Dahay Daniel - yea  
Mihret Adelaḥu - or compulsory to know  
Dahay Daniel - hmm  
Mihret Adelaḥu - but, most cases, like in my family, all of us know how to do it, so it's not a compulsory thing, but once you reach that age, you would be asked to do it and like if you don't know how to do it, you won't be able to do it. So it's like, it's a learning process  
Dahay Daniel - ok  
Mihret Adelaḥu - without you knowing - knowing that you're learning it, you would...know how to do it [laughs].<sup>170</sup>

This discussion reveals two things: first, even after the regime was overthrown 1991, the coffee ceremony not only continues to be practiced, but it also continues to be taught to

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<sup>170</sup> Mihret Adelaḥu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa, ON, April 21, 2016.

young girls. This is important because this shows that the ceremony prevailed despite many other radical social and cultural reforms. The second point is that, although it remains a marker of womanhood, it is not compulsory to learn it, indicating a possible shift in culturally defined roles of womanhood. Traditionally, a woman's gender would be questioned or scrutinized if she did not follow the culturally prescribed notions of what it means to be a woman.<sup>171</sup> The observance and gradual participation of the coffee ceremony allows a young girl to become acculturated thereby elevating her status to womanhood as she begins to perform the ceremony on her own.<sup>172</sup> A girl had to learn it, prepare it regularly, and the quality of the coffee itself was also a key to securing one's status as a woman. Mihret's point of the coffee ceremony not being compulsorily learned reveals that, although it is still very much gendered, a woman's identity does not come into question if she does not know how to perform the coffee ceremony. Confined within a woman's domain, it is through its production and reproduction that it is associated with a gender identity.<sup>173</sup>

However, this does not exclude women from active participation in public affairs. As with any social gathering, the coffee ceremony provides women with the opportunity to openly discuss matters that extend beyond the household, including social and political issues.<sup>174</sup> Though the coffee drinking space is primarily in the home, the line between private and public domain is blurred when political and economic issues affecting

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<sup>171</sup>Thera Mjaaland, "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony: Woman's Agency in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia," *Årboksredakjonen in Betwixt and Between Sosialantropologistudentenesårbok*(University of Oslo, 2004), 73.

<sup>172</sup>Jennifer A. Brinkeroff, "Being a Good Ethiopian Woman: Participation in the "Buna" (Coffee) Ceremony and Identity" (Ph.D., Arizona State University, 2011), 169.

<sup>173</sup>Thera Mjaaland, "Beyond the Coffee Ceremony: Woman's Agency in Western Tigray, Northern Ethiopia," *Årboksredakjonen in Betwixt and Between Sosialantropologistudentenesårbok*. (University of Oslo, 2004), 72.

<sup>174</sup>Toru Sagawa, "Wives' Domestic and Political Activities at Home: The Space of Coffee Drinking Among the Daasanetch of Southwestern Ethiopia," *African Study Monographs* (2006): 78.

everybody become the topics of the coffee ceremony (a practice that is not traditionally considered political). Through the coffee ceremony, women continued to be important players within the community's affairs during the Derg era. Being able to transform itself from a private to a public space, without being detected as a political space, was what perhaps allowed the coffee ceremony to remain elusive during Derg rule. Recognizing the importance of women in "all their struggle and sacrifices," Daniel Belay pointed out that a gathering of women for coffee was considered less threatening:

Because the coffee ceremony is mostly gender based, women are not very visible in the outside world and always could be undermined by the military as if being less threatening...so I don't think there was any focus on attacking or dismantling the coffee ceremony, per se.<sup>175</sup>

For this reason, a group of older women gathering at each other's home as they had always done seemed far less subversive than an assembly of active and politically-minded youth.

### **The Therapeutic Effects of the Coffee Ceremony**

The trauma that Ethiopians experienced throughout the regime could not be remedied by any formal counseling or psychiatric services since there were limited facilities available at the time.<sup>176</sup> Having coffee, then, was in itself a form of therapy as it allowed for family, friends, and neighbours to share their problems. The extent to which people suffered under the Derg and its effect on their well-being and mental health has become increasingly researched; however, this has often been incorporated with the study of depression and isolation upon settling in a new environment to escape persecution. The experiencing and

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<sup>175</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

<sup>176</sup> Frank Kortmann, "Popular, Traditional, and Professional Mental Health Care in Ethiopia," *Transcultural Psychiatry* (1987): 268.

witnessing of torture, executions and the treatment of dead bodies, coupled with the journey to safety, which in itself was extremely risky, and finally resettling in a society where refugees experience a major culture shock, is a tremendous amount to handle.

In addition to that, many Ethiopians living in Diaspora find themselves unable to work in professional fields because their education or experience is considered inadequate. Some may be unable to fully express themselves to others due to a language barrier or may not be able to locate resources or services to assist them, which leads to frustration. This can lead to further feelings of alienation, depression and anxiety. Studies have explored the effects of having coffee within groups of Ethiopian females and males respectively, who have migrated to Western nations, all stressing the importance of the ceremony as being a symbol of their culture, reminding them of their homeland and making it possible to open up due to its function as a social gathering. Sociologist David Palmer examines the effects of the coffee ceremony as a way of “preserving cultural heritage as a strategy for overcoming forms of social isolation and disadvantage” for male Ethiopian migrants in the United Kingdom.<sup>177</sup> In this study, he relies heavily on oral histories to gain insight into these negative feelings that have been internalized due to a lack of knowledge or access to services that offer counseling to the public.<sup>178</sup> The United States has a service called the Kaffa Intervention, which combines the coffee ceremony with Western psychology. Participants are Ethiopian and Eritrean female refugees, who share similar experiences, yet

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<sup>177</sup> David Palmer, "Beyond Buna and Popcorn: Using Personal Narratives to Explore the Relationship Between the Ethiopian Coffee (Buna) Ceremony and Mental and Social Well-Being Among Ethiopian Forced Migrants in London, UK," *Advances in Mental Health* (2010): 274.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 268. This article is part of a larger study of Ethiopian male migrants who have fled in recent times. Palmer's review of literature shows that globally Ethiopian male migrants who are in their late 20s and early 30s that have fled, reportedly due to Ethiopian governments lack of effort to improve its human rights practices.

do not know each other until they come together for the group session.<sup>179</sup> These women begin to open up and share their stories with each other over coffee. Within Ethiopia, there has been a study on existing health care systems that fall within popular, traditional and professional sectors to treat psychiatric disorders. Looking specifically at the popular sector, this normally requires the coming together of family and friends to provide solutions or suggest methods of healing, which explains how the coffee ceremony is recognized as a form of healing.<sup>180</sup>

The coffee ceremony became crucial to Ethiopians throughout Derg rule because a whole way of life that had been enjoyed was destroyed, leaving many in distress because of radical socio-economic and political changes. Resistance to these changes made life for all Ethiopians extremely dangerous; people, especially students, were arbitrarily arrested, tortured and killed. The continuation of the ceremony became imperative not only for the survival of Ethiopian culture as whole, but also the reestablishment of networks that were forcibly disbanded under the regime. Efram Mesegena recalls a time when mothers who were grieving for the death or imprisonment of their child would come together for coffee to comfort one another:

The coffee ceremony for mothers, you know, sometimes they get together and they comfort each other because each house has one person in prison, or in every household at least, they lose one person, so they comfort each other. And sometimes [the mothers] organize [a] mothers organization, [and] when the Derg knows this, [they tell

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<sup>179</sup> Michael I. Loewy, DiAnna Toliver, Aster Keleta, "Group Counselling with Traumatized East African Refugee Women in the United States: Using the Kaffa Ceremony Intervention," *Journal for Specialists in Group Work* (2002): 176-177.

<sup>180</sup> Frank Kortmann, "Popular, Traditional, and Professional Mental Health Care in Ethiopia," *Transcultural Psychiatry* (1987): 255-256.

the mothers'] stop the gathering...so that means everyone fear that, so they stay at home.<sup>181</sup>

This anomaly as an untargeted gathering speaks to the extensive monitoring that took place in Ethiopia. So long as women were gathering for coffee, it was deemed as non-threatening, but when gathering served purposes of consolation, the ceremony appeared to have a subversive tone to the government. Efreem's example of the mothers' organization became a target because it was an association that existed outside of the Derg's politically-oriented group. A meeting such as this, within a coffee ceremony, was at times flagged as potentially dissident. This suspicion, as Daniel Belay remembers, made some people afraid to leave their homes:

It's not the coffee that they attack, it's the gathering, the getting together. People become afraid to go to their neighbour's house or meeting up but if they, if they get the chance to have coffee, they're not visible, I mean, I don't think the military was focusing on the coffee ceremony itself.<sup>182</sup>

In these difficult times, one needed to find a way to grieve and the ban on mourning took a toll on the bereaved. Parents reportedly died of grief<sup>183</sup> because their children, spouse or family members were killed or had disappeared. The coffee ceremony became crucial for some to seek comfort when no other means were allowed. Mulugeta Gebru remembers witnessing the detrimental effects of the government's ban on mourning on mothers, and how the ceremony provided a comforting space for private grieving:

At one point people weren't allowed to sit and mourn their death,

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<sup>181</sup>Efreem Mesegena, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>182</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

<sup>183</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 117.

people actually forced not to cry even though they saw they dump the dead bodies of their kids, right on their door steps, and lots of, lots of mothers would go completely crazy, like insane...and the mom opens the door, the dead body is there and she is forced not to cry and people the neighborhood was forced to go around the dead body and sing the revolutionary songs, so the only place you can have comfort is inside your home when somebody comes and visits and have coffee and talk about all these things.<sup>184</sup>

To internalize grief and mourn in secret was damaging to one's psyche since there was a culturally prescribed process of mourning prior to 1974. As a form of resistance, people found ways to comfort each other in secret, so the coffee ceremony became a space for comfort and therapy. In order to better understand what many experienced, it is imperative to include examples of the traumas that people endured along with their feelings of powerlessness. The following five passages are taken from Moussa's discussion with female refugees. Their stories are harrowing tales of their tragic circumstances before settling in Canada:

My mother died six years ago...she was very depressed because of my brother...then my uncle was shot by the Dergue...A year before she died my oldest brother died...They took my father to prison and also my sister. They are always suspicious about you so it is very hard on my mother...They never left us alone. They wanted my brother because they wanted him to serve in the army. Imagine to fight against our own brothers and sisters. They killed my brother...My eldest and youngest sisters are still in prison. Two brothers are in prison. A brother and sister are refugees. It is very hard. I was cry.<sup>185</sup>

Our brother was killed. Not in the war. He was a high school teacher. When the revolution came they thought he was against the

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<sup>184</sup>Mulugeta Gebru, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>185</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 118.

government. He was arrested and sent to prison. After one month he was killed. He was thrown in the street. It was during the Red Terror. It was terrible...Our neighbours checked and they found his body. They came to tell us. First they closed all the doors and windows and they told us they found his body lying in the street. It was terrible. We can't cry. We can't make a noise. We had to hold our mouths like this [hand over the mouth] and hold our crying. We were choking our crying. It does good to cry. We had a lot of suffering.<sup>186</sup>

They imprisoned my oldest daughter four years ago. I take her food to the prison every day but I have not seen her for four years. I don't even know if she gets the food I send her...They killed one of my sons. When my two youngest sons saw his tortured body, they left without telling us their plan...I had my youngest daughter and they left. They, the young people, had no future in our country and were constantly being harassed by the police.<sup>187</sup>

Once I was visiting my [relative] in hospital and I was seeing how they were killing people in the street...I was looking from the window. They were just shooting people who were standing there. People just drop on the ground when there is shooting. There was this man who got up after they left. He climbed the hospital wall and tried to come in. So I went down to open the door. He was full of blood. The nurse was shouting. I told her to keep quiet, to save this man...They came back and counted the bodies in the street...They found him and shot him in front of all the patients. They missed the first time, but he did not have a second chance. It's life. It becomes natural.<sup>188</sup>

One of my friends had a very bad time [torturing in prison]. We were not allowed to see her. So when she was sent to hospital, we visited another lady who was sick, her bed was beside my friend's bed. We couldn't talk to her openly. They beat her on the back and poured water on her. All her nails were pulled out. She couldn't put

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<sup>186</sup> Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 119.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 122.

clothes on her body. We tried to give her comfort by speaking indirectly.<sup>189</sup>

Torture, as we can see, was a major part of the government's effort to force Ethiopians into submission. It was used to force confessions, punish prisoners, and to “intimidate the public not to be involved in any forms of protest”.<sup>190</sup> The different forms of torture are exhaustive but they include the removal of nails, cutting off digits, beatings, throwing people off cliffs, sleep deprivation, burning with hot irons or cigarettes. The intensity and variety of torture methods was meant to inflict physical, psychological and emotional damage to the ones who directly suffered and to those who were forced to watch. Those who were lucky enough to survive and return to their families and those who experienced the loss of loved ones, either through executions or disappearances (which often were secret executions), could not openly express their emotional pain. Therefore, they resorted to the coffee ceremony to grieve and comfort each other.

The studies discussed above underscore the importance of the coffee ceremony for social binding and therapy. Unlike the studies where the participants did not know each other, Ethiopians in the country had already established informal structures —family, friends and close neighbours —to gather daily for coffee. This familiarity needed to be maintained, particularly because of a rise of paranoia and distrust within communities, so it continued on a more private and discreet level. Prior to 1974, it was customary for a woman to openly invite her friends over for coffee or send her children off to their neighbours to find out who would be preparing it. This transformation of the ceremony as one that became

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<sup>189</sup>Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas: Artemis Enterprises, 1993), 123.

<sup>190</sup> Melakou Tegegn, "Mengistu's 'Red Terror'," *African Identities* (2012): 254.

very intimate and private, as Abdulaziz Musa stated, was meant to protect the very people sharing the information:

The purpose didn't change, but the way they conduct, the way they celebrate the environment changed, you know from calling neighbour openly for coffee...they keep it private...It's like therapy, people talk, they gossip. ... the people they know each other, they talk about what's going on. who was in prison, why they went to prison, whom [to be] careful of, things like that. Even talking is comfort, I think".<sup>191</sup>

The coffee ceremony as a reproduction of rituals, whether it be a daily practice or its continual practice over generations, offered comfort to those in need of it and as Daniel Belay puts it, it served as a reminder of the ceremony's uniqueness as well as providing Ethiopians with a sense of identity:

You always wanted to spend time with your friends or family. It's like a pattern, a usual thing. So doing that gives you some sense of purpose. Whether its cultural identity or group identity or friendship so you have to fulfill that, all the time, and the coffee becomes the most important item when you need comfort with your friends, with your families, or when you mark the occasion of happiness. So the purpose did not change. The manner did not change. The delivery did not change. So coffee became ... hidden from the government, the only friend sometimes, in times of sadness, to some people. The only companion, someone who can tell them that you're not alone...Coffee is not looked at by the government as a way of mourning. As long as the woman is not wearing a black dress, as long as there is no crying, as long as, the coffee is not seen as part of mourning or anything, that's part of and people are not coming to the house in a way it would look like mourning. It could be one friend or two friends, they make it look like it's as usual. Life goes on, kind of thing. But the coffee provides that sense of comfort at least ...they know that this is going on everywhere. A lot of other people are going through the same thing. It's a reference, a connection, it gives

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<sup>191</sup>Abdulaziz Musa, Skype interview by Dahay Daniel, April 24, 2016.

you that, that [sense] that there are others like me, kind of, some sort of virtual network.<sup>192</sup>

### **Coffee Ceremony, Censorship and Resistance**

The censorship of information was not introduced to Ethiopia after the Derg assumed power, but rather was a seminal part of rule under the *ancien regime* that was meant to control, withhold and twist information. Ironically, it was the public broadcast of the 1973 Wollo famine that ultimately led to the downfall of Haile Selassie despite the imperial government's best efforts to conceal it. The suppression of information was meant to control what was spreading, particularly at a time when global events that were shaped around the context of the Cold War were developing. The Press and Information Department of the Imperial Government, which would become the Ministry of Information under Derg rule, had strict guidelines as to what could or could not be disseminated. These included strikes, revolutions, coups d'état, political assassinations, Cold War polemics, among other matters or global issues. Since these were perceived to be threatening to the emperor's rule, they were purposely excluded from the media so as to not provoke or incite similar situations in Ethiopia. Therefore, the task of controlling information gave the ministry employees' "extraordinary power over what the Ethiopian people were entitled to know and not to know".<sup>193</sup> These censorship privileges, though meant to protect the interests of the emperor

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<sup>192</sup> Daniel Belay, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, May 2, 2016.

<sup>193</sup> Alem Mezgebe, "Ethiopia: The Deadly Game," *Index on Censorship*, 1978, 17. The author worked as the private secretary to the vice-Minister of Information and held the position for two years until he was exiled after being considered threatening to the emperor for his additional work as a disc jockey. Music was under scrutiny by the imperial government, conflicting with the music programs he wanted to air. He would return to Ethiopia after the revolution to find that the issue of censorship would not change under the new regime.

and later the Derg as well as to preserve their security and safety, were in fact more dangerous to the public.

The Derg's consolidation of power was a continuation of the imperial government's censorship laws. The masses that had spoken out against the monarchy were silenced once again through the Derg's violent measures. In a brief period between the end of the Haile Selassie era and the Derg's ascension to power, Daniel Haile stated that there was a window of freedom that allowed people to openly share their opinions:

At the beginning when the Derg came to power, they were more or less democratic; there [were] no problems with the Derg. People were airing out ...their opinions in newspapers, in radio, very nice stuff. The Derg changed after [they] start killing people.<sup>194</sup>

Decades of censorship were fiercely and openly combated by students and other demonstrators, paving the way for the Derg to usurp power and secure it by firmly closing the avenues by which information could be transmitted. The dissemination of information was severely repressed, coming under state control once the Derg secured their power. In an attempt to spread their own ideology, they nationalized all media organizations which operated as the Ministry of Information, and within the ministry there existed a censorship department that restricted the consumption of all forms of media. This meant that any conflicting or opposing views towards the government was punishable by imprisonment or death.<sup>195</sup> Under state control, the media was reoriented to pump out propaganda or shut down news organizations all together, with new ones created in their place. The efforts to impose censorship drove some organizations and media outlets to operate clandestinely,

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<sup>194</sup> Daniel Haile, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>195</sup> Meseret Chekol Reta, *The Quest for Press Freedom: One Hundred Years of History of the Media in Ethiopia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2013), 178-179.

although they too became targets of the Derg.<sup>196</sup> The government's control on media outlets made it difficult for people to exchange information throughout Derg rule. The manipulation of news by the Ministry of Information prevented people from fully understanding the extent to which people suffered. Following in the steps of the imperial government, the Derg understood that the less people knew, the better their hold over the country was. If people could not even cry over the loss of their loved ones because of the state ban, then speaking about their imprisonments or torture was surely punishable. Despite the regime's measures to hinder the spread of information, people found ways such as the coffee ceremony to circumvent the censorship laws. Already a social setting where people gather to discuss an array of topics, the ceremony became one of the only ways that people could share what they saw or heard. The following are two passages from two friends, Mulugeta Gebru and Efreem Mesegena, demonstrating the importance of the coffee ceremony as a tool for the circulation of information:

It was probably the only way to disseminate information, like information about [the] whereabouts of your kids, information as to when they might be released, ok. People are believing in hopes and now every year, when they have, when they celebrate the day of their victory, the day they toppled the government you'd expect them to release a few prisoners here and there ok, so people would have coffee together and talk about that, 'oh they're gonna release, I heard', I heard this, I heard that', its exchange of information and mainly comfort.<sup>197</sup>

All the families get together based on coffee ceremony, to comfort each other and to get information because now there's lots of youth, they escape from the country, most of them are in prison, most of

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<sup>196</sup> Meseret Chekol Reta, *The Quest for Press Freedom: One Hundred Years of History of the Media in Ethiopia* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2013), 181.

<sup>197</sup> Mulugeta Gebru, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

them are dead, you know, so all the neighbourhoods is affected by that. That's the only place they can comfort and they can exchange information so that's a big part of the coffee.<sup>198</sup>

Nearly everyone experienced the pain of either themselves or their loved ones facing imprisonment, torture or death and discussing this provided some hope for those left in the dark regarding the circumstances of their loved ones. For example, people were sentenced to prison over the most trivial matters and could remain detained for an indefinite period of time or be transferred to another location without the knowledge of their families. Not knowing, understanding or having access to the proper information regarding the situation or whereabouts of a family member made those at home feel helpless against the government. The power of dialogue gave hope in a hopeless situation.

While all the men interviewed attested to the importance of the ceremony as a way to exchange information, it was not an entirely safe space. A strong sense of camaraderie and trust grew out of the familial and neighbourly gatherings that were regularly held for religious, cultural or informal occasions prior to 1974; however, Derg rule stripped groups of any sort of trust and left many to become suspicious of one another and often times turning on each other. Eyob Gebreselassie and Daniel Haile both provided accounts that detail the reality of not being able to trust anyone:

When it's the coffee ceremony, you should know who is sitting beside you, with whom [you are] talking about and you should [be] able to have a conversation with the right person, so you have to find out which one is the right person.... In one ceremony we could have ten or more than ten people but you don't trust anybody else, even you don't trust your brother at that time.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup>Efrem Mesegena, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>199</sup>Eyob Gebreselassie, interview by Dahay Daniel, Kitchener ON, Canada, May 29, 2016.

It was totally tattered, totally tattered. The members of the coffee group [were] scattered because ... they started to be divided into many, many sections. Some became members of a different political group, some become supporters...even in that coffee ceremony somebody is a spy.<sup>200</sup>

Political affiliations completely destroyed former circles of trust, scattering friends and family and often times endangering people's lives. People that gathered for coffee could also be part of other groups or associations that served to help community members by alleviating financial burdens, one of them known as eddir. Its purpose is to “defray the cost of funerals; to assist families in the event of the death, illness, unemployment, or imprisonment of their breadwinners; and to help in the case of loss due to fire”.<sup>201</sup> Members of an eddir contribute by making small but regular payments into a pot and solicited when needed. This offered security, not just financially, but gave individuals the added insurance that they had their communities' full support in times of hardship. But the emergence of new ideological and politically oriented groups under Derg rule realigned community members, thus breaking the bonds of trust. Daniel Haile stated that the killing of his brother completely shattered the pre-existing relationship between families and that new allegiance became paramount over these long-established forms of gathering:

I lost, my brother, my younger brother. They killed him. But the one who killed him was a member of our eddir. His wife was a member of this coffee ceremony with my mother. My brother was a friend of their son...he was on the side of the Derg and my brother was on the opposite. Now he killed him. My mother stopped drinking and that lady was immediately out. She can't drink with that lady. They were good friends. My father and all my brothers pulled out of that eddir,

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<sup>200</sup> Daniel Haile, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>201</sup> Donald N. Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 277.

they can't stay with that eddir, you know, it's too difficult...the community becomes totally divided. It was so homogenous becomes so heterogeneous, after the revolution. So it affected the coffee ceremony, the eddir, the association, members realigned themselves based on their outlook, you know similar outlook came together.<sup>202</sup>

Since the Derg targeted those whom they deemed were opposing their rule, there was a heightened reliance on secrecy in order to remain undetected. Open opposition was dangerous but there were ways that voiced their beliefs and in some cases, suppressed their voices to express their contempt of the government. Particularly during the Red Terror when people regarded others suspiciously and were told to report subversive activities by citizens, silence became not only resistance against the government but also a way of saving oneself and protecting others. In the following story, Mulugeta Gebru recounts a time when silence had saved both his and his friend's life, each remaining quiet out of sheer terror that one might belong to Derg:

That close related community, all of a sudden, [was] completely broken. Someone who you always considered like your brother, you act like you don't know him because, he might be a spy. They watch. ...I have a good example, I had a friend where I was living in Mekele at that time, ok. A friend of mine from my high school days, like a friend, we lived in a boarding school. And this was boardmate, my friend, like very close friend. So I saw him in Mekele in a cafe, big cafe, lots of young people, and he saw me too and he pretended like he didn't see me and I pretended like I didn't see him... because you don't know what that guy is. He came from Addis so he is worried that maybe I might report him, and if I report him he's gonna be in trouble, right? You can't travel from Addis to Mekele without special papers, you have to go to some office, some local office and get your papers and stuff, and you can forge them too but if I report you, then you go straight to prison and they gonna torture you and get you in trouble. So the guy acted like he didn't know me and I

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<sup>202</sup> Daniel Haile, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

acted like I didn't know him. And we met after the revolution and we started talking about that day, he remembered, I remembered. 'Do you remember that day?' 'Yeah, I saw you too'...The trust was gone.<sup>203</sup>

In the loss of societal power, silence became a way of survival. Vocalizing one's dissent was extremely dangerous because speaking out or being suspected of speaking out against the government had consequences. However, the coffee ceremony gave many people the opportunity to vent out their frustrations on social, political and economic changes. The Ministry of Information's efforts to hinder all forms of information sharing contributed to the 'autonomy' the coffee ceremony had enjoyed as being a place to complain about the government indirectly. The complaints were not so much an attack on the government's measures, but merely reactions, including frustration with the increasing prices of coffee. In other words, it was through the daily ritual of drinking coffee together that people had the opportunity to learn about what was occurring in their neighbourhoods and throughout the country, as "...the coffee ceremony was one of the [ways] information spread from one [person] to [another]."<sup>204</sup> Therefore, the complaints of the people on the economic measures put in place by the Derg became part of the hidden discussion around the coffee ceremony. For example, "'why is sugar this expensive?' 'why are we buying this and that?'"<sup>205</sup> These complaints were a reaction to the radical economic changes that occurred shortly after the Derg took power, which had an effect on the coffee ceremony. Abdulaziz Musa asserted that "coffee became scarce...and harder to come by, it's harder partake of it"<sup>206</sup> which Daraje Leiyu also pointed out that people could not "afford to make the coffee ceremony two times

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<sup>203</sup>Mulugeta Gebru, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>204</sup>Efrem Mesegena, interview by Dahay Daniel, Ottawa ON, Canada, June 6, 2016.

<sup>205</sup> Solomon Aklilu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Carleton University, April 11, 2016.

<sup>206</sup>Abdulaziz Musa, Skype interview by Dahay Daniel, April 24, 2016.

or three times ... it's expensive".<sup>207</sup> Under the Derg, new and drastic economic measures were put in place to shift Ethiopia's feudal economy to a socialist economy. The intention of nationalizing private land was ultimately to redistribute it to the peasantry, thus excluding the former private owners from any land reimbursement. In early 1975, 'Land to the Tiller' became one of the slogans that made the new government appealing to a majority of the peasants as it became possible for all to own and cultivate their own lands. It was in March of that year that the government published a preamble to the Rural Land Proclamation that stressed a complete reorientation of land ownership and equilibrium among the masses. An excerpt of the proclamation:

Whereas, in countries like Ethiopia where the economy is agricultural, a person's right, honour, status and standard of living is determined by his relation to the land...Whereas, it is essential to fundamentally alter the existing agrarian relations so that the Ethiopian peasant masses...may be liberated from age-old feudal oppression, injustice, poverty, and disease, and in order to lay the basis upon which all Ethiopians may henceforth live in equality, freedom, and fraternity.<sup>208</sup>

What this meant was that land was under public ownership; no one was to be employed as hired labour and all former debts to landlords were wiped out. The land reforms also catered to gender equality, stressing that regardless of gender, anyone who wished to cultivate land could do so.<sup>209</sup> In such a short time, the Derg implemented these policies that were very progressive, which seemingly fulfilled the outcries of the impoverished masses. In addition to its popularity, it was also believed that these new land reforms would improve “the

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<sup>207</sup>Daraje Leiyu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Kitchener ON, Canada, May 29, 2016.

<sup>208</sup> René Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, trans. A.M. Berrett (London: Zed Press, 1983), 89.

<sup>209</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

efficiency in peasant agriculture”.<sup>210</sup> As a result, peasant associations were created in order to allocate land among the peasantry; by allowing them to have control, this would prevent any sort of transition to the former order.<sup>211</sup> This also meant that former landlords were not to be compensated with any land, but this was in itself damaging as it was a loss of entrepreneurs and an understanding of private capital. Because the power and control over land had been overturned to peasants, they were able to consume whatever they produced, reducing the amount of food going to the urban markets, which led to food shortages and higher prices, coupled with the government's lack of efforts at improving a proper transport and distribution system.<sup>212</sup> The nationalization of land and its extensive reforms were highly problematic. While peasants were promised that they could own and cultivate their own land, their produce was still at the mercy of the government as they were not permitted to transport produce to other regions. Expounding on that, “restrictions on inter-regional transportation have led to inter-regional price differentials and adversely affect consumers by pushing up prices in areas where there is a deficit but keeping down prices in surplus areas, thus dampening incentives”.<sup>213</sup> As Denny Aschnaki puts it, this affected the production, distribution and acquisition of coffee:

Coffee is the backbone of the economy, you know what I mean, they used to sell the top, the prime coffee used to actually be, you know, exported, you know, to other countries and whatever is available even at the time was scarce, coffee wasn't easily available.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Göte Hansson, *The Ethiopian Economy 1974-9: Ethiopia Tikdem and After* (London: Routledge, 1995), 26-28.

<sup>211</sup> René Lefort, *Ethiopia: An Heretical Revolution?*, trans. A.M. Berrett (London: Zed Press, 1983), 93.

<sup>212</sup> Kurt Jansson, Michael Harris, Angela Penrose, *The Ethiopian Famine* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 117.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>214</sup> Denny Aschnaki, interview by Dahay Daniel, Kitchener ON, Canada, May 29, 2016.

This drove people to complain about the government, in this case, with issues pertaining to the coffee ceremony. Those who opposed the regime could, in this way, express their discontent about the Derg measures, even around the coffee ceremony. As a place where people naturally and organically discussed private, personal and political matters, the coffee ceremony was that space that information was shared, whether it was risky or not. Even silently participating in the ceremony allowed one to grasp what was occurring beyond one's personal experience, as Solomon Aklilu stated, “if you sit down in a real coffee ceremony, you will understand the situation of the country without even talking to anybody ...they talk that, so you will understand the problem in the country”.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Solomon Aklilu, interview by Dahay Daniel, Carleton University, April 11, 2016.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this research has been to examine the role of the Ethiopian coffee ceremony and to determine whether its continued practice throughout the repressive Derg regime functioned as a cultural thread, linking that era to that of the pre-Derg years. Derg rule completely altered the way of life for many Ethiopians; it quickly shifted from a culture that thrived on communal life to one of fear and paranoia, tearing Ethiopians away from their societies. These societies functioned through regular gatherings in religious and cultural contexts which established networks of trust between family and friends. This provided Ethiopians with security and a sense of identity, within their respective communities and on a national level as well. The pre-Derg years presented itself with its own issues, such as the centuries-long feudal system that drove people to revolt against the emperor, but in spite of that, Ethiopians were not prepared for the horrifying changes that would come when the monarchy was overthrown. The revolution that sought to put an end to Haile Selassie's reign had no viable political plan in place to create a civil government, thus allowing the Derg to usurp power. Once the military had a taste for political power, under the command of Mengistu, they became embroiled in a power rivalry with the remaining imperial government, the civilian student groups, and with its own members, which resulted in years of senseless bloodshed. The imprisoning, torture, and killing of innocent Ethiopians became so routine that by the end of the regime, most Ethiopians had been directly affected by the governments' repressive and violent measures.

While a great deal of literature has focused on the political violence perpetrated by the Derg, little attention has been placed on the social upheaval as a result of its desire to reorient Ethiopian culture. The Derg's prohibition on social gathering and its attack on

religion were meant to breakdown the very foundation that allowed Ethiopian culture to thrive. Gatherings of any sort, particularly among youth, were looked at as subversive and were punishable if people were caught or reported. In place of former modes of gathering, new associations were created to teach Marxist-Leninist ideology, and gain support among the Ethiopian people. These new associations, along with the emergence of several revolutionary groups, shattered the stability that existed among family, friends and neighbours.

The promise of religious equality masked the true intention of removing religion from Ethiopia, as the regime believed it to be a cancer. Knowing the value of religious practice, the Derg tried to align religion, particularly the church, with the former imperial rule so as to present it as a cooperator with the monarch as their oppressor. In order to continue their practice, many did so in secret for fear of persecution. In their mission to stamp out religion, the Derg planned to convert churches and monasteries into museums, and other establishments that were affiliated with religion were remodeled to serve the regime's purpose, which was the case with Meskel Square. Named after the holiday that commemorates the discovery of the True Cross, it was renamed to Revolution Square where public gatherings celebrating the Derg took place. Perhaps the cruelest of the Derg's measures was the state ban on mourning. Mourning those who were killed by the military was also punishable and banning it was extremely damaging to the grievers' psyche. It represented a complete reversal of how life and death had been valued in Ethiopian culture. Crying for loved ones that were killed was not considered mourning by the regime; it was viewed as allying with the supposed 'counterrevolutionaries'. One's tears or screams were seen as subversive and many mourners were punished as a result.

Consequently, the coffee ceremony became a means to deflect the repressiveness of the Derg, as it was not outright targeted by the regime. The coffee ceremony was performed and practiced daily, if not multiple times a day, and primarily done at one's home with a single woman at a time preparing the beverage. It was a time for women to gather -although men partook too- and gossip, share news, and counsel each other, etc. Because of its widespread practice in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation, it served a wide array of purposes: celebrating and commemorating occasions and events. During the Derg years, gathering for coffee was not without risk since Ethiopian communities were transformed from a culture of togetherness and openness to one of fear, secrecy and paranoia. But the coffee ceremony became emblematic of comfort and counseling and since it had already served that purpose before, it would become more important once the Derg took power. As a gendered practice, it appears that the coffee ceremony remained undetected by the Derg, as it was not perceived as subversive for a group of older women to gather. Juxtaposing this with gatherings of youth, the latter were targeted as they were seen to be a real threat to the government. The youth that were murdered at the hands of the Derg led to an outpouring of grief that was forced to be contained.

The coffee ceremony, which had been incorporated into mourning rituals prior to Derg rule, became a safer space to grieve and seek counseling in secret. While not able to mourn in a manner that was culturally sanctioned, the ceremony provided an opportunity for some to share their grievances with those, who most likely, were suffering under the same or similar circumstances. Sharing news also became vital to cultural stability. The government had clamped down on newspaper and media outlets, carrying on the tradition of censorship from the former imperial government. Since information was either withheld or manipulated

by the regime, the spread of information was dependent on the coffee ceremony. Any amount of sharing could allow one to piece together what was happening within one's own community. The entire country was in disarray from conflicts, both internally and externally, and the increasing air of paranoia resulted in mass confusion in regards to what was going. There was little trust between people because of the regime's realignment of societies, but the coffee ceremony provided hope by allowing people to share news of what they heard or saw, perhaps giving peace to those left in the dark by the Derg's censorship laws. The coffee ceremony as a woman's domain, as a place of comfort, and a space to share information were not new aspects of the ceremony; however, they became vital for the survival of the Ethiopian people and the culture.

My hope for this research was to shed light on a matter so few are aware of and to contribute to the growing literature on the coffee ceremony and the Derg era, respectively. Perhaps in the future of academia, the Derg regime will serve as an important example of state violence as well as an element of the communist narrative. There is still a great deal of research that is needed, subject matter which I had to exclude from my thesis but would make excellent topics for further study.

### **Further Research**

This research experience, which first began at home by listening to my father's stories, has raised so many questions and if explored, will help to fill the gaps that still exist in the historiography of both the coffee ceremony and the Derg era. While delving into the literature and interviewing my respondents, I became inundated by new information that sparked interest in further inquiry; however, some of the insights I obtained were not

directly relevant to this research. For example, I learned that practitioners of the Protestant church were subject to persecution simply because they were members of that faith. The government regarded Protestantism as a product of Western imperialism and so, it discriminated against more than those who adhered to Orthodox Christianity or Islam. My research only provided a glimpse into the suppression of religion, but I believe a deeper historical study is needed to better understand the relationship between the Derg and religion. But referring back to the Derg's rejection of Western imperialism, an interesting sub-topic is the prohibition of material culture. Following in the tradition of the Soviet Bloc, anything that came from the West was viewed as subversive to the regime. For example, one of the respondents brought up the term “jolly-jackism,” which meant following the fashion trends of that time, such as bellbottoms or other types of fashionable attire. Perhaps the acquisition of Western material culture was a way of showing resistance; examining this would be useful in understanding other types of social restrictions that the Derg devised.

Another important issue that needs to be explored is that of post-Derg Ethiopia. While the new government, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), tried to rectify the damage cause by the Derg in the new constitution, I wonder if Ethiopians' day-to-day life was able to return to pre-Derg normalcy. Since networks of trust were severed, were communities able to regroup after the regime was overthrown? Also, I have learned that in the twenty-five years since Derg rule ended, this era was not openly discussed among Ethiopians because the implications of the regime continue to be felt as the deep-seated scars of the terror have remained in the minds of victims who faced torture, imprisonment, and exile as well as those who lost loved ones. In this period of paranoia, confusion, and fear, how have Ethiopians healed and how have they made sense of what has

happened? As a public initiative to move forward in healing, the Red Terror Martyr's Memorial Museum in Addis Ababa was established in 2010 and offers free tours which display photographs of survivors, photographs of Derg members, torture instruments, victims' remains and more. The museum also aims to honour the victims, many of whom were not able to be mourned for at the time of their executions, in order to help Ethiopians heal by allowing people to revisit their memories, to make sense of the sudden and indiscriminate tragedies they experienced, and to be a voice for those who died under the regime. But at the individual level, how did healing occur, if at all?

Turning our attention back to the coffee ceremony, throughout this research I also wondered if a history of the ceremony could be constructed. With no definitive history on its origins, its development has been explained through speculation. While this contributes to a cultural understanding of Ethiopia's nationalistic narrative, is it still possible to find data on the ceremony's birthplace, its subsequent adoption across the country, and its appropriation of materials and traditions? Furthermore, while examining the different components of the coffee ceremony, like with other ceremonies involving incense and grass, I came to believe that a further study of the relationship between the ceremony and religion or spirituality would greatly enrich the historiography. Before I began my thesis, I was unaware of the religious and spiritual connotations that exist in the ceremony. Perhaps by researching this, historians may come closer to discovering the ceremony's roots.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Illustrations



**Illustration 1.** Mengistu's declaration of war against EPRP at Revolution Square.



**Illustration 2.** Woman pouring coffee from jebena (pot) into the sini (cups) with incense burning in foreground.



**Illustration 3.** Coffee preparation. Top left: Raw coffee beans stirred over pan; Top right: Roasted coffee beans; Bottom left: Mortar and pestle, Middle: Jebena boiling coffee over coal stove: Ceremony set-up with sini, rakabote, and jebena.

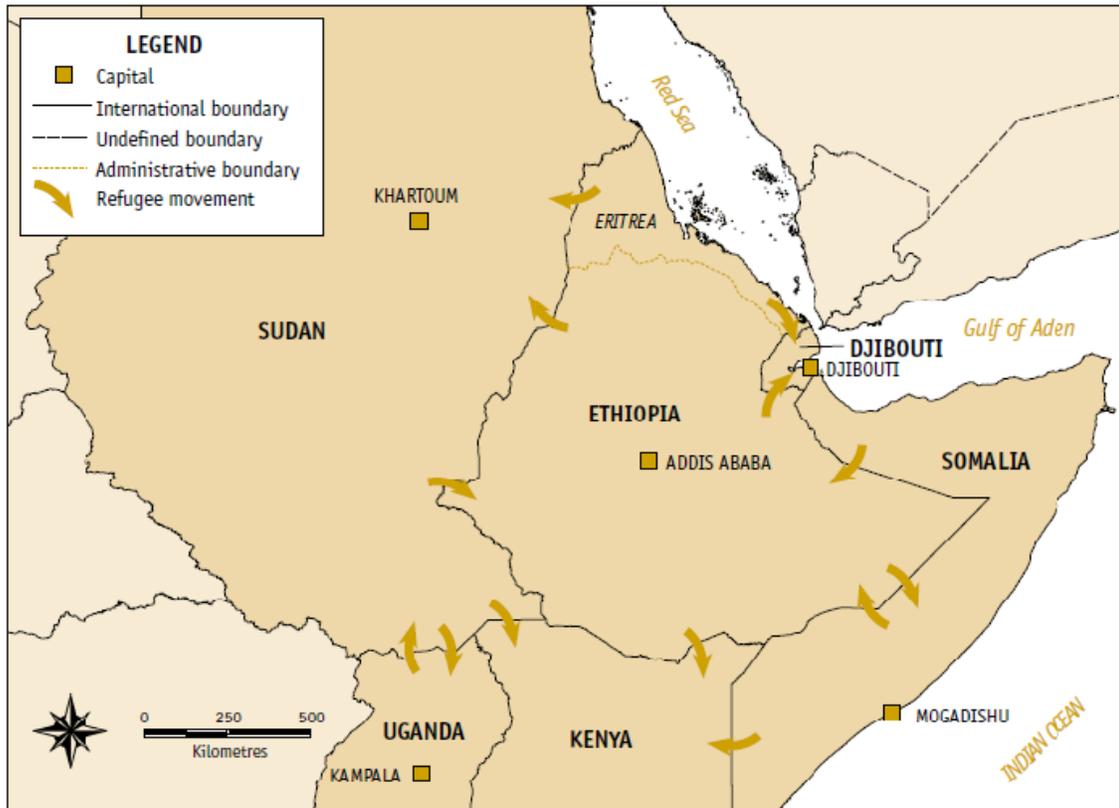


Illustration 4. Map of refugee flows.



## Appendix B: Mengistu Haile Mariam's Execution Order

Translation of Mengistu Haile Mariam's Letter Authorizing the extra-judicial killing of 54 senior officials of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I's government. Copy of the original letter in Amharic is provided below.

“(Logo) Provisional Ethiopian Military Government

Hidar 13, 1967 Eth Cal  
(November 22, 1974 GC)

To: The Dergue's Campaign & Security Division Officer  
Addis Ababa.

VERY URGENT!

Subject: Implementation of the Policy Decision Regarding Officials of the Former Government

The Revolutionary Dergue comprising representative of the oppressed military is proceeding with its governance of the country for the purpose of fulfilling the objectives of the people's revolution against the feudalistic and abhorrent system of government.

Ever since the establishment of the Revolutionary Dergue, it has proceeded beyond dismantling the monarchy by detaining and investigating the officials of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I and has made high level political decisions with regard to the senior military and civilian officials who have been oppressing and exploiting the Ethiopian people for the last 40 years.

At the high level meeting conducted by the Dergue members recently, a unanimous decision has been made by all the members of the Dergue that the first round of a revolutionary action (meaning killing in Dergue's parlance\*) be taken against the former government's officials whose names are listed in the enclosure to this directive. (\*words in bracket are the translator's.)

### ORDER

- 1) L/General Aman Andom Michael should be placed under custody today from his home and be brought to the palace to join the prisoners.
- 2) A pit shall be dug at the Kerchelle main prison for 54 people using a dozer and the Senior civilian and military officials listed from No: 1 to 54 shall be kept separate from the other prisoners by 8:00 pm.

We hereby notify that they shall be transported by military vehicles to the main Kerchelle prison where they shall be shot to death at 8:00 / 02:00 /.

(signature)

(Seal) Provisional Ethiopian Military Administrative Dergue  
First Vice Chairman  
Mengistu Haile Mariam”

### Appendix C: Statistical Information from 11 Male Respondents

<u>Place of Origin</u>	<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>Refugee?</u>	<u>Imprisonment?</u>	<u>Escape Route</u>	<u>Date of Arrival to Canada</u>
<b>Adigrat</b>	Tigrayan	Yes	Yes	Sudan - Egypt - Canada	1987
<b>Harar</b>	Oromo	Yes		Djibouti - Somalia - Italy - Canada	1988
<b>Axum</b>	Tigrayan		Yes		1990
<b>Harar</b>	Oromo/Amhara		Yes		1990
<b>Dire Dawa</b>	N/A	Yes		Djibouti - Egypt - Canada	1990
<b>Gondar</b>	Amhara	Yes			1991
<b>Addis Ababa</b>	Amhara				1995
<b>Addis Ababa</b>	Eritrean	Yes	Yes	Sudan - Egypt - Canada	1997
<b>Addis Ababa</b>	Eritrean				2000
<b>Gojjam</b>	Amhara				2001
<b>Harar</b>	Amhara				2004

## Appendix D: Ethics Clearance Form



Carleton University  
Research Ethics Office  
Research Ethics Board  
511 Tory, 1125 Colonel By Drive  
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6 Canada  
Tel: 613-520-2517, ethics@carleton.ca

### Ethics Clearance Form – New Clearance

This is to certify that the Carleton University Research Ethics Board has examined the application for ethical clearance. The REB found the research project to meet appropriate ethical standards as outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Human, 2nd edition*, and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research*.

**Date of Clearance:** February 29, 2016

**Researcher: Susanne Maria Klausen (Primary Investigator)**

Dahay Daniel (Student Research: Master's Student)

**Department:** Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences\History (Department of)

**University:** Carleton University

**Research Supervisor (if applicable):** Prof. Susanne Maria Klausen

Dahay Daniel (Student Research: Master's Student)

**Department:** Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences\History (Department of)

**University:** Carleton University

**Research Supervisor (if applicable):** Prof. Susanne Maria Klausen

**Project Number:** 103834

**Project Title:** Memory And Ritual: The Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony in the Ethiopian Revolution [Dahay Daniel]

**Funder (if applicable):** N/A

**Clearance Expires:** May 31, 2016

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### All researchers are governed by the following conditions:

**Annual Status Report:** You are required to submit an Annual Status Report to either renew clearance or close the file. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the immediate suspension of the project. Funded projects will have accounts suspended until the report is submitted and approved.

**Changes to the project:** Any changes to the project must be submitted to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board for approval. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.

**Adverse events:** Should a participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. You must submit a written record of the event and indicate what steps you have taken to resolve the situation.

**Suspension or termination of clearance:** Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.



**Louise Heslop**

Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board



**Andy Adler**

Vice-Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board

## Appendix E: Ethics Clearance Renewal Form



Research Compliance Office  
511 Tory | 1125 Colonel By Drive  
| Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6  
613-520-2600 Ext: 4085  
[ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

### CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE

Ethics approval for the following research has been **renewed** by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (CUREB-A) at Carleton University. CUREB-A is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

**Title:** Memory And Ritual: The Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony in the Ethiopian Revolution [Dahay Daniel]

**Protocol #:** 103834

**Principal Investigator:** Dahay Daniel

**Department and Institution:** Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences\History (Department of), Carleton University

**Project Team (and Roles):** Susanne Maria Klausen (Primary Investigator)

Dahay Daniel (Student Research: Master's Student)

Effective: **May 18, 2016**

Expires: **May 31, 2017.**

#### **Restrictions:**

This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the final application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-A. All changes must be approved prior to the continuance of the research.
3. An Annual Application for the renewal of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the above date. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. A closure request must be sent to CUREB-A when the research is complete or terminated.
5. Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to CUREB-A.
6. It is the responsibility of the student to notify their supervisor of any adverse events, changes to their application, or requests to renew/close the protocol.
7. Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Please email the Research Ethics and Compliance Office at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca) if you have any questions.

**CLEARED BY:**

**Date: May 18, 2016**

Andy Adler, Acting Chair

Carleton University Research Ethics Board - A

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